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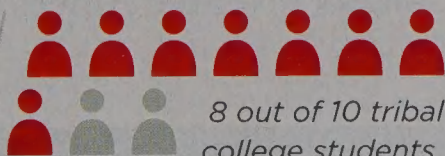
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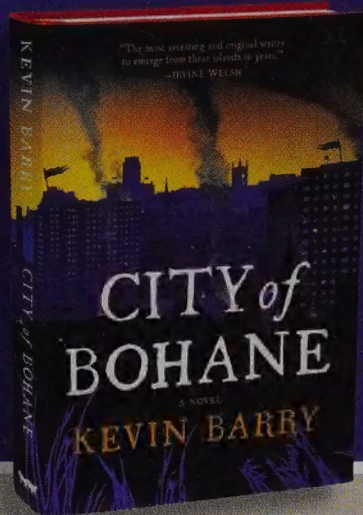
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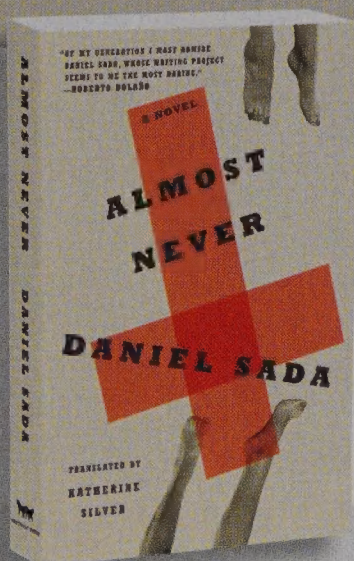
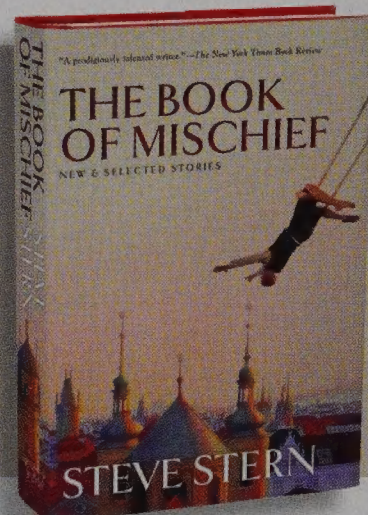
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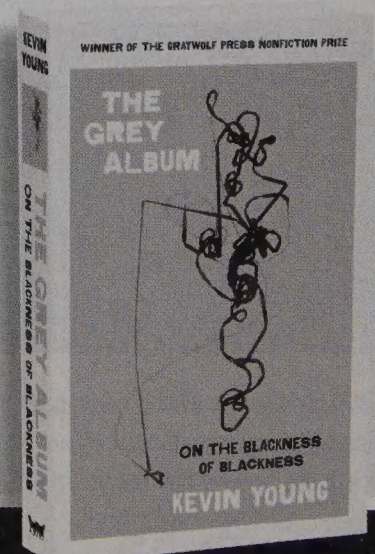


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LETTERS

Infinity and Beyond

Near the end of Alan Lightman's essay on humanity's understanding of the infinite ["Our Place in the Universe," December], he considers what a small fraction of the universe exists in living form and concludes, "If some cosmic intelligence created the universe, life would seem to have been only an afterthought." Thousands of years ago, a psalmist pondered a similar conundrum:

When I consider thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers, the moon and
the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of
him? and the son of man, that thou
visitest him? (8:3-4)

While both writers express awe at the universe, referring to a cosmic intelligence beyond the stars, the psalmist makes the much bolder assertion: Divine being not only creates life but also cares for humans, despite our relative smallness. The magnitude of this claim was not lost on the psalmist. Ancient civilizations might have lacked our ability

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to measure the size of the universe with scientific precision, but their capacity for wonder was perhaps better developed.

Jeffrey Skaff
Princeton, N.J.

Alan Lightman provides an excellent review of our evolving understanding of the universe and our place in it, but he doesn't fully capture the implications of our most recent discoveries of planetary objects in nearby solar systems. His focus on their estimated percentage of biomass obscures what is far more important—the likelihood that life exists elsewhere in the universe. We now have reason to believe that the universe may be swarming with life—plant, animal, or something else entirely.

Science continues to challenge our assumptions of superiority and singularity. Earth is not the center of the solar system; the solar system is but a minuscule piece of the universe; and *Homo sapiens* is merely an evolutionary experiment in intelligence. Now we learn that life on Earth is not unique or unusual, and that there may be many worlds with life-forms at least as intelligent as we are. While this is dis-

concerting, it can also be a comfort: we can feel a kinship with these alien creatures whose biologies and morphologies we can only imagine and whom we will almost surely never meet. Somewhere out there, they peer outward, wondering about us.

Ed Martell
Toronto

Growing Pains

In his December Anti-Economist column ["Half Empty"], Jeff Madrick ably explains why blaming the poor for the country's economic woes is ridiculous. However, the most egregious aspect of the "makers and takers" narrative is not that it ignores the effects of wage stagnation and a regressive tax code but that its central premise turns reality on its head, pretending that the poor live in parasitical relation to the rich, when precisely the opposite is true. It has somehow been forgotten that the vast fortunes of such individuals as Mitt Romney and his top donors are essentially the accumulated fruits of other people's toil. Madrick's remedy—increased economic growth—will not alter this dynamic. Indeed, it should be clear by now that continued growth is a sure way to exacerbate economic inequalities.

Trevor Davis
Conway, Mass.

The Chosen

Uninformed and credulous readers could conclude from Andrew J. Bacevich's "How We Became Israel" [Reading, November] that this tiny country roughly the size of New Jersey bears the primary responsibility for modeling and thereby promoting the adoption of "global military dominance" as the strategy of the superpower that is the United States. This anti-historical "Israelification" fantasy draws on the centuries-old myth that Jews are all-powerful and intent on bringing about their own domination of the planet. Israel has now become the Jew of the world, charged with being the source of any

evil perpetrated around the globe, and thereby the designated target of deliberately propagated falsehoods like Bacevich's perverse diatribe.

Aviva Cantor
New York City

Andrew J. Bacevich responds:

Ms. Cantor is mistaken. I neither write nor imply that Israel has foisted its approach to national security on the United States. Leaders in Washington freely—and foolishly—choose to follow in Israel's footsteps. In doing so, they have served their nation poorly.

Correction

Wes Enzinna's "Man Underwater" [Review, December] incorrectly states that Richard Brautigan was prevented by scoliosis from serving in World War II. He was, in fact, found unfit for military service in 1953, nearly eight years after the war ended. We regret the error.

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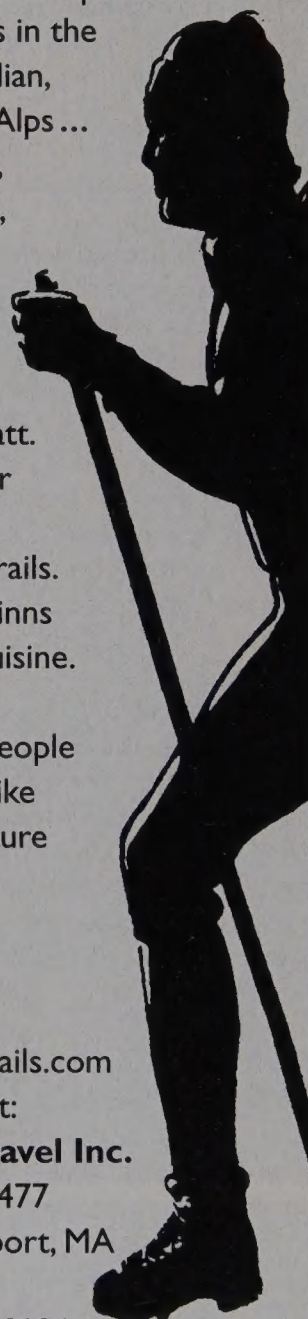
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EASY CHAIR

Team America
By Thomas Frank

There have been an estimated 16,000 books written about Abraham Lincoln; like the lives of the wealthy and the secrets of self-improvement, a fascination with the Great Emancipator is an unchanging feature of American literary taste. Few of these volumes, however, have had the extraordinary resilience of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. In 2005, when the book first appeared, it was the subject of "vast critical acclaim" and remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for some twenty-seven weeks, according to the press release that accompanied my copy. Three years later, a junior senator from Illinois named Barack Obama anointed *Team of Rivals* one of his favorite books, once again pushing it into the glare of public adulation. And last year, when Steven Spielberg transformed it into his movie *Lincoln*, the book climbed the charts for a third time. (Should the film win an Oscar later this month, the vastness of Goodwin's critical acclaim will no doubt get yet another boost.)

Despite having triggered these sequential booms in Lincolniana, *Team of Rivals* is uninspiring to the point of boredom. It is not only a retelling of the most familiar story in American history but also a fairly dreary one. Goodwin's account doesn't provoke or startle with insight. Most of what she tells us has been told us before—many, many times. Indeed, the theme song from Ken Burns's *The Civil War* played involuntarily in my head as I read, again, about the election of 1860, the Peninsula Campaign, the maneuvering in Washington over emancipation.

Goodwin's hypothesis, if she can be said to have one, is that the successes of the Lincoln Administration were not a one-man accomplishment. No, the president had help, and he knew how to

motivate people. It was Lincoln plus Secretary of State William Seward; Lincoln plus Attorney General Edward Bates; Lincoln plus Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase (you know, the man on the \$10,000 bill). Do you get it, reader? The Civil War was a *team effort*, in which men who didn't really like each other—political *rivals*, even—held important government jobs.

One cavil you might raise is that this isn't much of a revelation, since big wars are generally fought by national unity governments. Nor is the "team of rivals" concept an innovation of the early 1860s, though Goodwin assures us it is. As the historian James Oakes pointed out in 2008, administrations incorporating the president's adversaries were standard stuff in the early nineteenth century. They have been fairly common in our own time as well. During the Great Depression, for example, Franklin Roosevelt hired prominent men from the opposition to fill cabinet posts, and almost every subsequent president has followed suit.

It was, in other words, an unremarkable arrangement, documented here in an unremarkable book, all of it together about as startling as a Hallmark card. How did such a commonplace slice of history come to define our era?

To begin with, the book perfectly captures the beloved fatuities of our white-collar priesthood. The appeal of *Team of Rivals* to this corporate demographic is built into its very architecture: after Goodwin relates some familiar Civil War anecdote, she invariably ties it to Lincoln's style of personnel management—this being the true manifestation of his genius. And to every vexing human-relations question, *Team of Rivals* gives a pat answer. How, for

example, does one ride herd over a group of difficult, contentious, even creative people? Goodwin's Lincoln offers the following counsel: Listen more and blame less. Also: Be sure to relax now and then. Also: Don't hold grudges.

"Lincoln's Leadership Lessons" was the headline that *Forbes* chose for a 2006 interview with Goodwin. When *Harvard Business Review* spoke to her in 2009, they called their article "Leadership Lessons from Abraham Lincoln"; *Fast Company's* take on the book was headlined "The Leadership Genius of Abraham Lincoln." Goodwin herself is more original. When she spoke at the annual convention of the Society for Human Resource Management in 2008, she called her talk "HR Success Through [the] Lens of Lincoln."

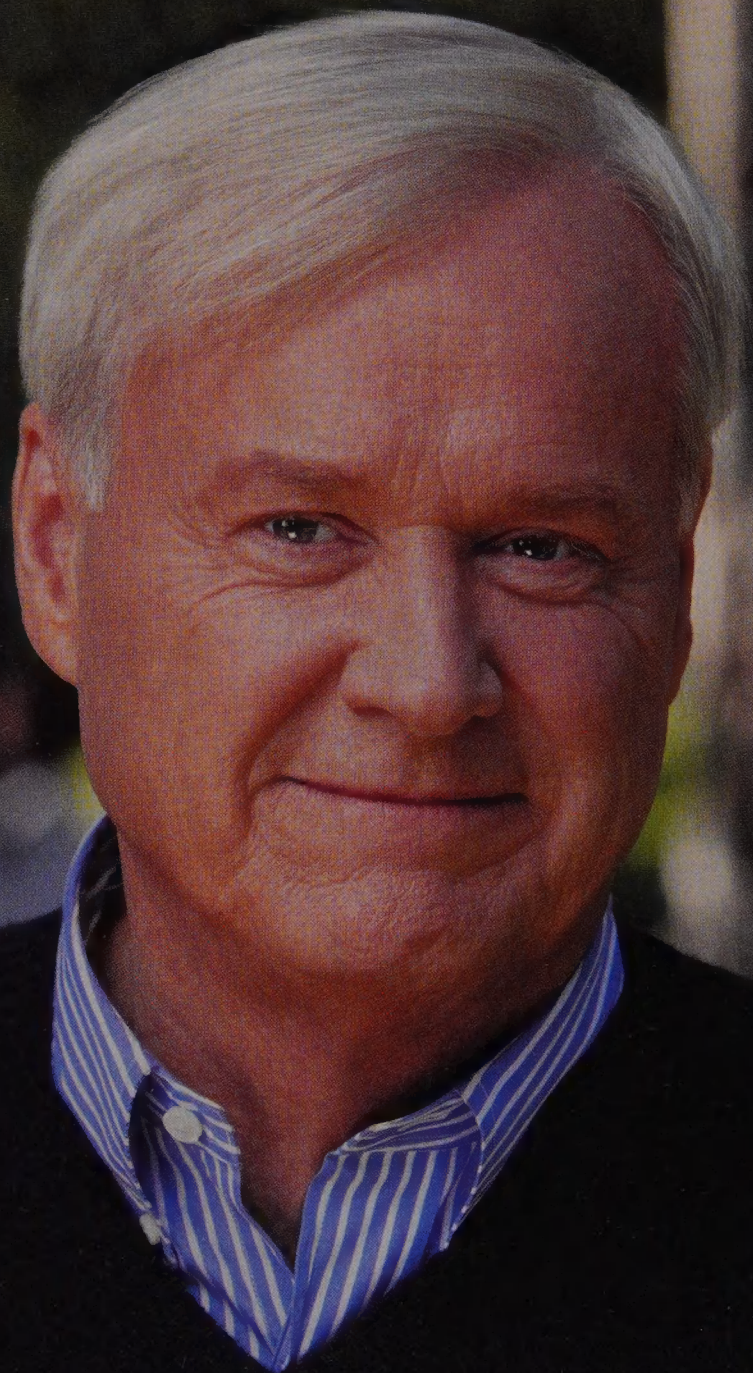
I'm sorry I missed that presentation; it must have been enlightening. I suspect this because *Inc.* magazine has listed *Team of Rivals* as one of the "Best Leadership Books of All Time." Donald Trump, in his 2009 magnum opus *Think Like a Champion*, includes it in his own recommended-reading list, as does superconsultant Jim Collins. In truth, however, this last, vast piece of critical acclaim shouldn't surprise anybody: as a blogger for the ManpowerGroup, "a world leader in workforce solutions," pointed out, "Lincoln personified the Level Five Leader immortalized in Jim Collins' *Good to Great*."

That was the initial phase of the book's rocketlike ascent into the middlebrow empyrean. The second stage, as I mentioned, came during the 2008 election season, after *Team of Rivals* was endorsed by Barack Obama. That's when it occurred to pundit after pundit that the book was about something that should properly warm the heart of every American: bipartisanship. The

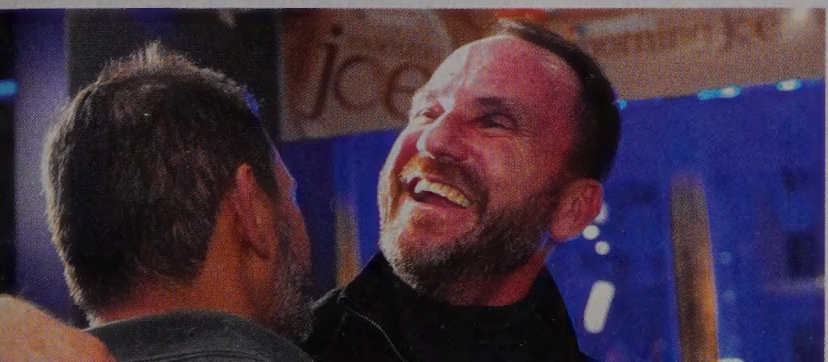


**"THE AMERICA THAT
VOTED IS BIG, DIVERSE
AND GENEROUS OF
HEART. IT'S TIME TO GO
TO WORK IN A NEW ERA
OF HOPE."**

- CHRIS MATTHEWS



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LEAN FORWARD



Obama/Lincoln comparison was suddenly the great cliché of the moment—it made the cover of *Time* in October and the cover of *Newsweek* in November. And once the election was over, the possibility of an executive-branch team of rivals became a fixation of our intellectual politburo.

Soon they were busily quizzing one another as to whether each new cabinet nominee fit the “team of rivals” template. Hillary Clinton obviously did, and the same might be said of Larry Summers and the Republican Robert Gates. When Obama nominated another Republican, Judd Gregg, for commerce secretary, the Lincoln comparisons flew; when he sought out the opinions of his recent antagonist John McCain, they soared. In a conversation with Tom Brokaw, NBC reporter Andrea Mitchell noted how *Team of Rivals* (by “our colleague and friend Doris Kearns Goodwin”) had influenced Obama, then suggested some additional rivals the president-elect might care to embrace:

He has John McCain coming tomorrow to Chicago. That is a very important step, they say.... There are others who have been mentioned: Chuck Hagel and, we know, Bob Gates at Defense, and other Republicans—his good friend Dick Lugar, who has not been persuaded to come to the State Department so far. So he really sees this in a very bipartisan way, in the true spirit of that.

Mitchell’s juxtaposition of “friends,” “rivals,” and “bipartisan” helps us understand the high-octane appeal of this plodding idea. To a modern-day Washington grandee, what assembling a team of rivals means is that glorious thing: an election with virtually no consequences. No one is sentenced to political exile because he or she was on the wrong side; the presidency changes hands, but all the players still get a seat at the table.

The only ones left out of this warm, bipartisan circle of friendship are the voters, who wake up one fine day to discover that what they thought they’d rejected wasn’t rejected in the least. And all in the name of Abraham Lincoln. Thanks for that, Abe.

Finally Steven Spielberg, that Michelangelo of the trite, signed on to what Goodwin was selling. His *Lincoln*

focuses very narrowly on a short segment of the book in which the president rams the Thirteenth Amendment—the one abolishing slavery—through the House of Representatives. It’s 1865, and Lincoln has just won reelection. Still, he doesn’t want to wait for a new Congress to be seated: the amendment must be passed immediately. This means winning a two-thirds majority in a lame-duck legislative body that is still filled with his opponents, and the bulk of the movie is a close study of the lobbying and persuading and self-censoring to which Lincoln and his team must descend in order to, well, free the slaves. These are the lessons for our time that Professor Spielberg has plucked from Goodwin’s Lincoln saga.

And upon beholding the film, the men of the middle mind saw the clouds part and the sun shine through. Yet another commonplace had been magnificently reaffirmed—a Triple Crown of banality for Doris Kearns Goodwin!—and this time it was the emptiest D.C. cliché of all. “It’s compromise,” is how Goodwin summarized the film’s message for an interviewer. And the commentariat chimed in unison: *Yes! We have learned from this movie, they sang, that politicians must Make Deals. That one must Give Something to Get Something.*

The film was a study in the “nobility of politics,” declared David Brooks; it teaches that elected officials can do great things, but only if they “are willing to bamboozle, trim, compromise and be slippery and hypocritical.” Michael Gerson of the *Washington Post* suggested that members of Congress be made to watch the thing in order to acquire “a greater appreciation for flexibility and compromise.”* According to Al Hunt of Bloomberg, the film shows our greatest president “doing what politicians are supposed to do, and today too often avoid: compromising, calculating, horse trading, dealing and preventing the perfect from becoming the enemy of a good objective.” And here is an exchange about the movie

* And lo! A screening was scheduled for the Senate on December 19. The invitation from Harry Reid and Mitch McConnell, who have been at each other’s throats for many years, noted that the film “depicts the good which is attainable when public servants put the betterment of the country ahead of short-term political interests.”

between David Gregory and—again!—Andrea Mitchell, two Beltway Brahmins experiencing a miraculous mind meld on an episode of *Meet the Press*:

MITCHELL: Compromise is not a bad thing. And you—you feel that ...

GREGORY: At a time when we so loathe politics ...

MITCHELL: Exactly.

GREGORY: ... so many people in this country.

MITCHELL: And it’s become caricatured and demonized.

Those cruel caricatures—they’re so unfair to Compromise! Clearly someone needed to rescue it from our sneering, cynical idealism.

Had Spielberg really wanted to make an historical epic about compromise, he could have filmed a chapter in the life of Lincoln’s great adversary Stephen A. Douglas, champion of the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Now *there* was a bamboozler.

But the movie Spielberg actually made goes well beyond justifying compromise: it justifies corruption. Lincoln and his men, as they are depicted here, do not merely buttonhole and persuade and deceive. They buy votes outright with promises of patronage jobs and (it is strongly suggested) cash bribes. The noblest law imaginable is put over by the most degraded means. As the real-life Thaddeus Stevens, leader of the Radical Republicans in the House of Representatives, is credited with having said after the amendment was finally approved: “The greatest measure of the nineteenth century was passed by corruption, aided and abetted by the purest man in America.”

The movie is fairly hard on crusading reformers like Stevens. The great lesson we are meant to take from his career is that idealists must learn to lie and to keep their mouths shut at critical moments if they wish to be effective. Lobbyists, on the other hand, are a class of people the movie seems at pains to rehabilitate. Spielberg gives us a raffish trio of such men, hired for the occasion by William Seward, and they get the legislative job done by throwing money around, buying off loose votes—the usual. They huddle with the holy Lincoln himself to talk strategy, and in

a climactic scene, Spielberg shows us that a worldly lobbyist can work wonders while a public servant dithers about legalisms. Happy banjo-and-fiddle music starts up whenever they are on-screen—drinking, playing cards, dangling lucrative job offers—because, after all, who doesn't love a boodle-bundling gang of scamps?

To repeat: Spielberg & Co. have gone out of their way to vindicate political corruption. They have associated it with the noblest possible cause; they have made it seem like harmless high jinks for fun-loving frat boys; they have depicted reformers as ideological killjoys who must renounce their beliefs in order to succeed. This is, in short, what *Lincoln* is about. All right, then: what does it mean to make such a movie in the year 2012?

Tony Kushner, the celebrated playwright who wrote the script for *Lincoln*, told NPR that the project had allowed him “to look at the Obama years through a Lincoln lens.” As in 1865, he said, there is enormous potential now for “rebuilding a real progressive democracy in this country.” There are “obstacles” to this project, however. And among the most notable ones, in Kushner's view, are those damn liberals—or more specifically, “an impatience on the part of very good, very progressive people with the kind of compromising that you were just mentioning, the kind of horse trading that is necessary.”

Many observers have described *Lincoln* as a gloss on President Obama's struggles with the Republican House of Representatives. The film's real message, however, is both grander than this and much smaller. It is, in fact, a two-and-a-half-hour étude on yet another favorite cliché: the impracticality of reform.

In truth, though, things are more complicated. Abolition was nine parts grassroots outrage to one part Washington machination. And since the middle of the Bush years, we have been living through another broad revival of reform sentiments. What ignited this revival, and what has kept it going since then, is a disgust with precisely the sort of workaday Washington horse-trading that the makers of this movie have chosen to celebrate. Remember? The Duke Cunningham and Jack Abramoff scandals. The soft-money campaign donations. The lobbyists who wrote the

Medicare prescription-drug benefit. The lobbyists who wrote the financial-deregulation laws. The power of money over the state.

I myself think it's healthy that public outrage over this stuff has simmered on into the Obama years; there's still plenty to be furious about. The lobbyists may be Democrats now, but they are pulling the wires for the same interests as always. The people who supported the deregulation of Wall Street (or their protégés) are still in power. And even the president's great health-care triumph was flawed from the beginning, thanks to a heavy thumb on the scales from the insurance and pharmaceutical industries.

Maybe complaining about all this is yet another hang-up of the contemporary Thaddeus Stevens set, who can't see that tremendous victories await if they'd just lighten up about reform. But maybe—just maybe—reform *is itself* the great progressive cause. Maybe fixing the system must come first, as a certain senator from Illinois once seemed to believe, and everything else will follow from that.

Lincoln is a movie that makes viewers feel noble at first, but on reflection the sentiment proves hollow. This is not only a hackneyed film but a mendacious one. Like other Spielberg productions, it drops you into a world where all the great moral judgments have been made for you already—*Lincoln* is as absolutely good as the Nazis in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are absolutely bad—and then it smuggles its tendentious political payload through amid those comfortable stereotypes.

If you really want to explore compromise, corruption, and the ideology of money-in-politics, don't stack the deck with aces of unquestionable goodness like the Thirteenth Amendment. Give us the real deal. Look the monster in the eyes. Make a movie about the Grant Administration, in which several of the same characters who figure in *Lincoln* played a role in the most corrupt era in American history. Or show us the people who pushed banking deregulation through in the compromise-worshipping Clinton years. And then, after ninety minutes of *that*, try to sell us on the merry japes of those lovable lobbyists—that's a task for a real auteur. ■

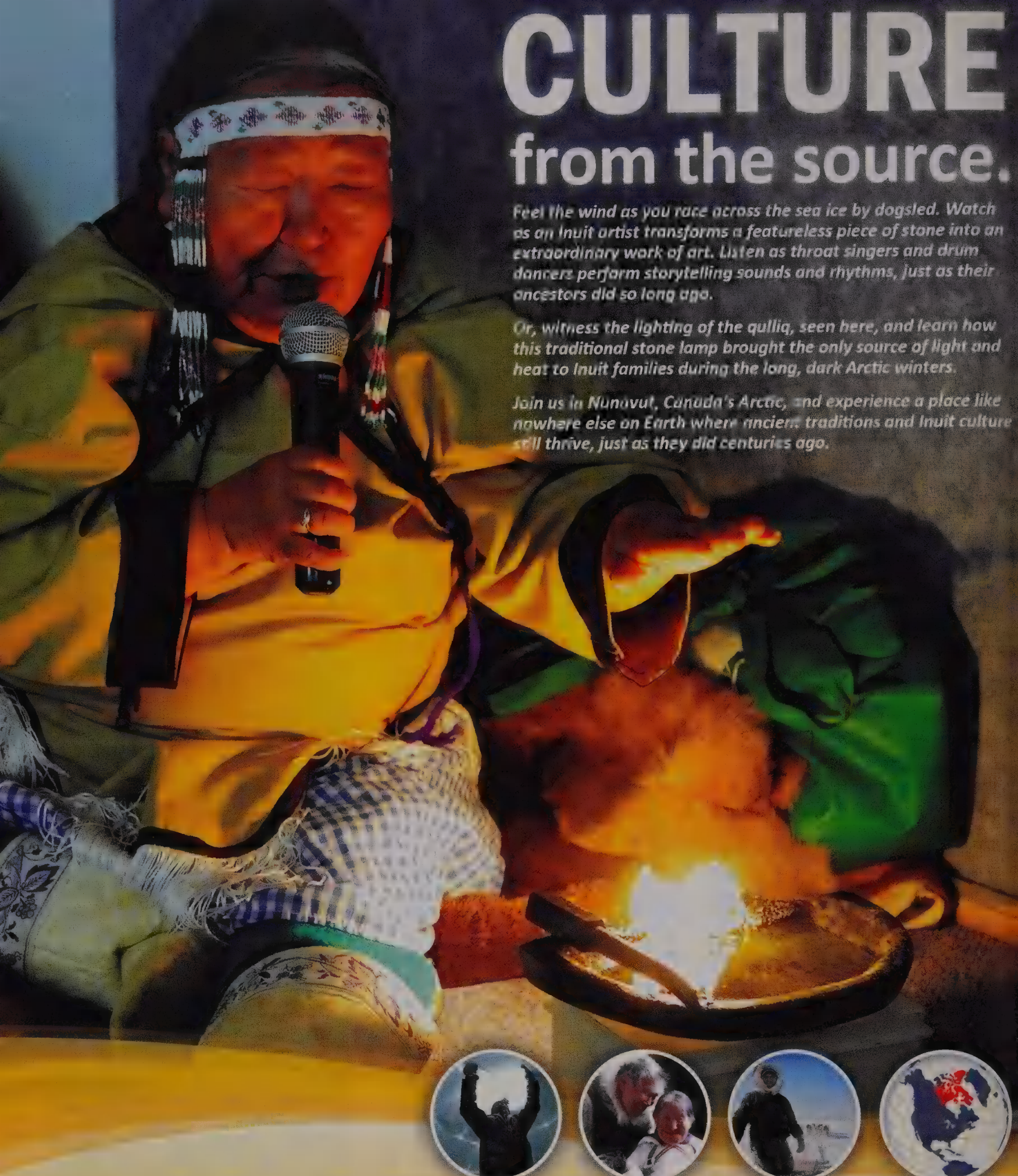
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THE ANTI-ECONOMIST

Revised History

By Jeff Madrick

Last month, Oliver Stone's *Untold History of the United States*, the documentary series the director made with historian Peter Kuznick, completed its ten-episode run on Showtime. Those who unthinkingly dismiss Stone as a conspiracy theorist might be surprised by this scrupulously accurate warts-and-all consideration of the American century, which complicates our self-serving national folklore. More than thirty years after its publication, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* has attained the status of a classic, but we could use more efforts in this direction. "There is no such thing as impartial history," Zinn acknowledged, but revisions like his and Stone's provide a necessary corrective to the ignorance and whitewashing that often proceed from national embarrassments.

Unfortunately, we almost entirely lack similarly comprehensive correctives to prevailing economic history. It has been a century since the publication of Charles Beard's famous *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, which argued that the Founding Fathers designed the Constitution partly to serve their own material interests. Since then, romantic and ideological myths about how America became prosperous have too often gone unchallenged. This is more than an academic concern: these

misapprehensions continue to drive poor policymaking today.

What myths would a good alternative economic history debunk? The first might be that America owed its rapid economic growth in the nineteenth century to the small size of its federal government. This widely accepted narrative neglects the many regulatory and legal reforms that went into effect in those years, reforms guaranteeing fair competition in business and the right of ordinary people to buy land. The myth also ignores state-financed investments in canals and railroads; the development of free primary (and, later, high school) education, paid for with taxes; and the building of sewers and water-sanitation systems in cities, which controlled disease. It overlooks high tariffs, imposed by the federal government, that spurred the development of manufacturing. This is not to mention the economic benefits of slave labor (hardly a laissez-faire arrangement), which required government enforcement. For good or for ill, intervention by the state into economic life was a reality of the time.

There have been similarly damaging misinterpretations and distortions of our economic boom in the years following World War II. What caused economic growth in Ameri-

ca during this time, when our federal government was undeniably large and active?

Tyler Cowen, a respected conservative economics professor who writes frequent columns for the *New York Times*, attempts to answer this question in *The Great Stagnation*, a small book—really a pamphlet—that made the *Times* bestseller list in 2011. It's a silly, trivial book, but a representative one. According to Cowen, America's postwar prosperity can be reduced to a few simple principles: plentiful natural resources in the early years, technological advances, and an increasingly educated population.

Is this adequate history? Howard Zinn wrote that the "chief problem in historical honesty isn't outright lying" but the "omission or de-emphasis of important data." In the case of America's two and a half postwar decades, Cowen is right to note the importance of natural resources—but a balanced economic history would also note that the price of petroleum, the most important natural resource at that time, was kept artificially low. Oil consumption tripled in the 1950s and 1960s, yet prices fell because of diplomatic machinations and threats of force that maintained U.S. access to growing reserves in the Middle East. Government made the difference.

Cowen is also quite right to note the key role technological advances

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played in our postwar boom, but these advances, too, were often driven by government stimulus. Cowen scoffs at the "nostalgia" of such economists as Paul Krugman who advocate Keynesian spending as a way to return to full employment, but Keynesian policies drove growth in the postwar era. The Cold War and the growing political power of defense companies—Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex"—kept defense spending at 12 percent of gross domestic product in the 1950s and 10 percent in the 1960s. Those decades also saw the implementation of enormous government-sponsored research and development projects, the building of the interstate highways, and the continuation of the G.I. Bill and other forms of tuition subsidies, all of which contributed to growth. Today, even during a major war, military spending is around 5 percent of GDP. I point this out not to argue for more military spending but to suggest how much we could afford to be investing in education, research and development, communications, and transportation infrastructure.

Cowen barely acknowledges government's role in education, but he does at least recommend more federal subsidies of research. Central to his claims about the futility of most other government policies to enhance growth today is the assertion that such advances as the combustion engine, the commercial jet, the nation's highways, and the Internet have been fully exploited. The "low-hanging fruit," as Cowen terms it, has all been picked.

But none of these advances looked like easy picking before they were developed, and Cowen has no empirical reason to believe that the march of technology has ended. He is simply making a stab in the dark to justify his preferred policy of minimal government action. To this end, Cowen either doesn't know or chooses not to tell us that the "low-hanging fruit" hypothesis was also used in the 1930s to explain the Great Depression. Alvin Hansen, a prominent Harvard economist, was the leading advocate in that era of

basically the same stagnationist thesis Cowen presents today. But as we know, and as the post-World War II boom showed, he was wrong. War spending provided the Keynesian stimulus that turned the Depression's stagnation into rapid growth. Once the economy recovered, there proved to be plenty more low-hanging fruit to be plucked.

Another economic myth is that the debilitating inflation of the 1970s was caused by loose monetary policy—that is, by the Federal Reserve's creating too much money through the imposition of very low interest rates. Annualized inflation reached as high as 11.2 percent in that decade. High inflation in turn pushed up the rates that lenders demanded to compensate for the reduced value of money in the future. Interest rates on mortgages, for example, peaked at around 18 percent.

Milton Friedman was foremost among those who blamed inflation on the loose monetary policy pursued by Jimmy Carter's Fed. Friedman's view has since become conventional history. But the belief is mostly wrong. More likely culprits—as Princeton economist and former Federal Reserve vice chairman Alan Blinder persuasively argued as early as 1982—were two years' worth of major crop failures, which led to soaring food prices, and the Arab nations' oil-price hike, which quadrupled prices, from roughly \$3 a barrel to \$12 by 1974.

This contrarian take was angrily challenged, but in 2008, with Federal Reserve economist Jeremy Rudd, Blinder ran the data again. There were revisions to be accounted for. They found even stronger support for the original claim that food and oil "supply shocks," not Fed policy, had accounted for the majority of inflation. Why does this argument matter? Because if Fed policy is the cause of high inflation, then the solution is to tighten the money supply and raise interest rates—even if that means a punishing recession. In other words, throw people out of work and cut spending on goods and services. And this is just what the Fed

subsequently did under Paul Volcker. The truth, I conclude from Blinder's work, is that inflation would have gradually subsided even without harsh monetary policy—that is, without a recession.

The Friedman mythology is also the source of another related historical fantasy: the heroism of Paul Volcker. Late in his presidency, Carter chose Volcker to replace G. William Miller as Fed chairman. Volcker soon reversed Miller's dovish monetary policy, eventually raising the Fed target rate—the point at which the central bank seeks to set short-term borrowing rates between banks—to a high of 20 percent in 1981, 10 percent above where it stood when he took charge in 1979. Other borrowing rates rose accordingly. The economy went into free fall, and unemployment soared to nearly 11 percent in 1982. It was the worst recession since the Great Depression. Not only do economists give Volcker a pass on the severe recession, but he is among the most praised policy-makers of our time.

For the subsequent twenty-five years, keeping inflation low—to about 3 percent a year—became virtually the only economic goal of Washington policymakers. Yet there is no empirical evidence to suggest that higher inflation rates would reduce economic growth. One fine report, written by several economists, including the Nobel laureate George Akerlof, showed that a higher inflation target throughout this period would have been entirely acceptable, even desirable.

Perversely, this obsession with inflation made the real aim of monetary policy keeping the unemployment rate high. If one tries to lower unemployment below its "natural rate," said Friedman and his followers, inflation will follow. It turned out to be one of the great hoaxes of the time. In the 1980s, even liberal economists claimed the so-called natural rate was as high as 6 percent. But by 2000, the unemployment rate fell below 4 percent, with no sign of rising inflation. Economists didn't backtrack; instead they decided that the once inviolable natural rate sim-

ply changed all the time, and they set about figuring how to predict these variations. They haven't succeeded yet.

One last major historical myth in need of debunking: Ronald Reagan, an economic hero to so many, did not revitalize the economy through sharp tax cuts and deregulation. To the contrary, his policies badly failed. Under Reagan, income inequality began to rise rapidly after three decades of solid increases in earnings across all income levels. The top 10 percent of earners received 92 percent of all new income during this period, compared with 35 percent of the rise in income from 1960 to 1969.

Wages grew far faster after Clinton's tax hike than after the implementation of Reaganomics. And as for revitalizing productivity, output per hour of work—the key measure of the economy's ability to produce income—rose far more slowly under Reagan than it did before or after.

The assumption that technology, natural resources, and a more educated workforce are the only important sources of growth leads us to believe that Keynesian policies are not valuable. The assumption that inflation has been caused by the Federal Reserve's effort to keep unemployment down leads to policies that keep interest rates high, unemployment up, and wages low. Romanticizing the achievements of Ronald Reagan leads many to believe that tax cuts inevitably generate rapid economic growth.

Most damaging, however, are views of history, like Cowen's and many other economists', that fail to recognize the central place of government policy and intervention in economic growth. One tragic result of such views was the extreme financial deregulation and weak implementation of existing regulation that led directly to the financial crisis and the Great Recession. Another result is the weakness of current policies aimed at supporting the recovery—in particular, the failure to adopt a second fiscal stimulus back in 2009, and current austerity policies that will further diminish growth and perhaps even lead to a recession this year. ■

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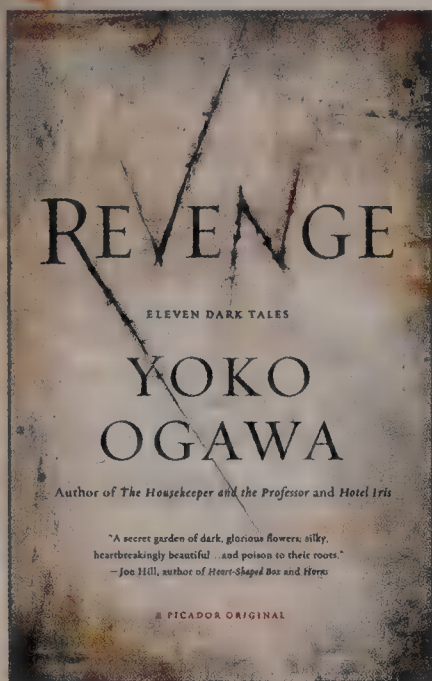
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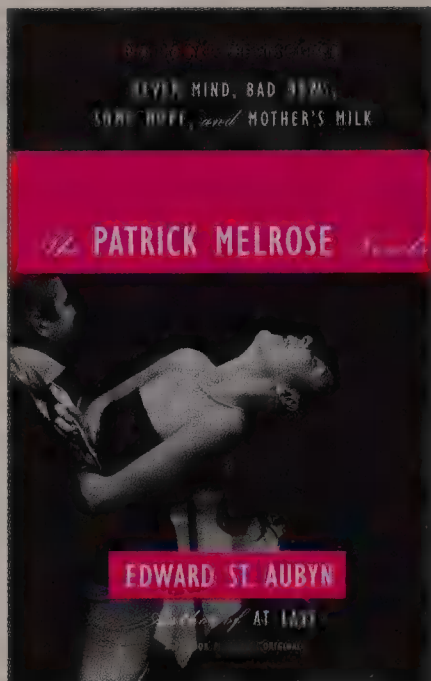
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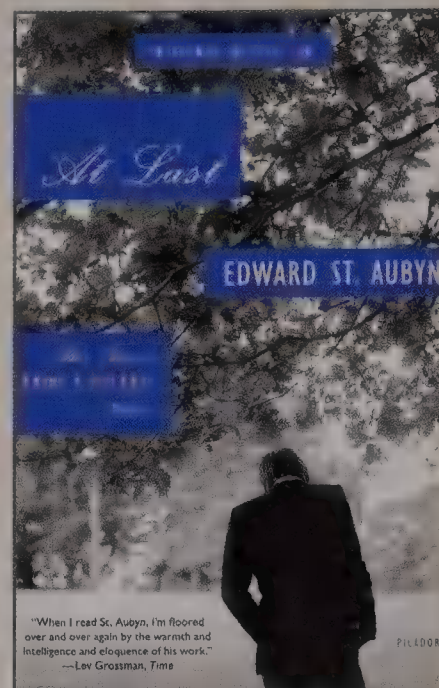
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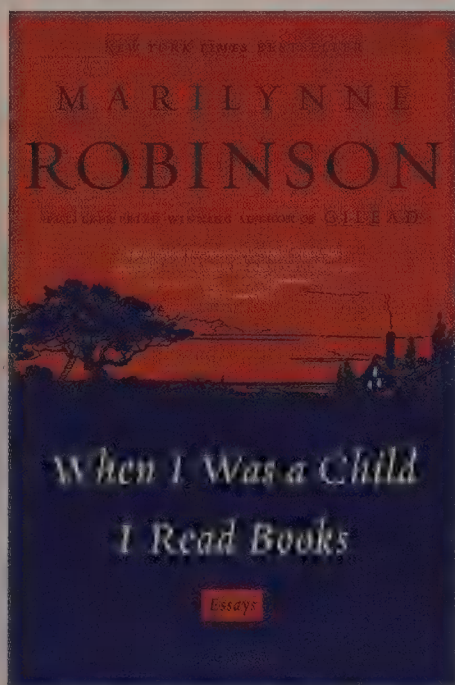
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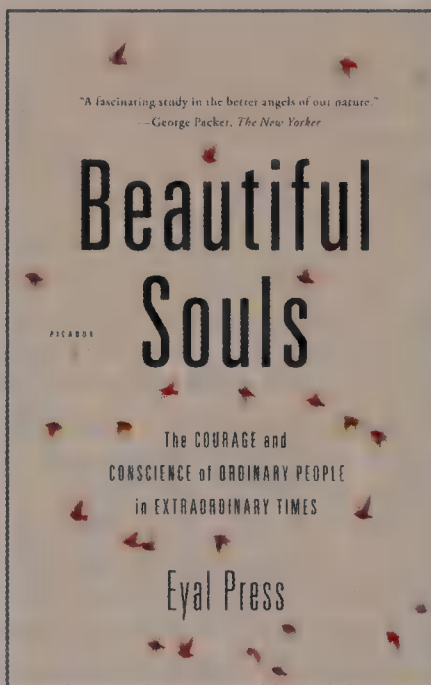
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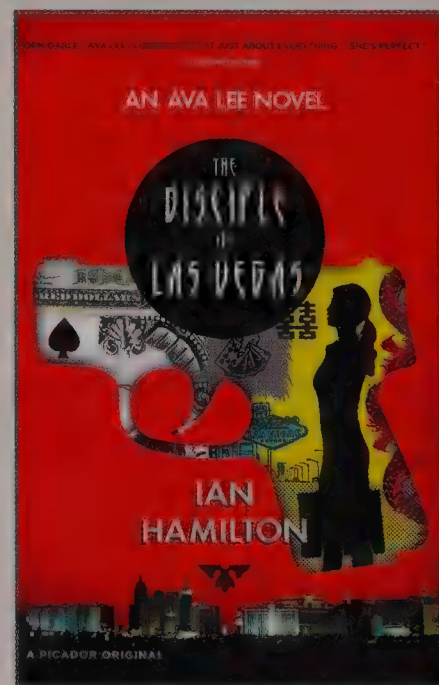
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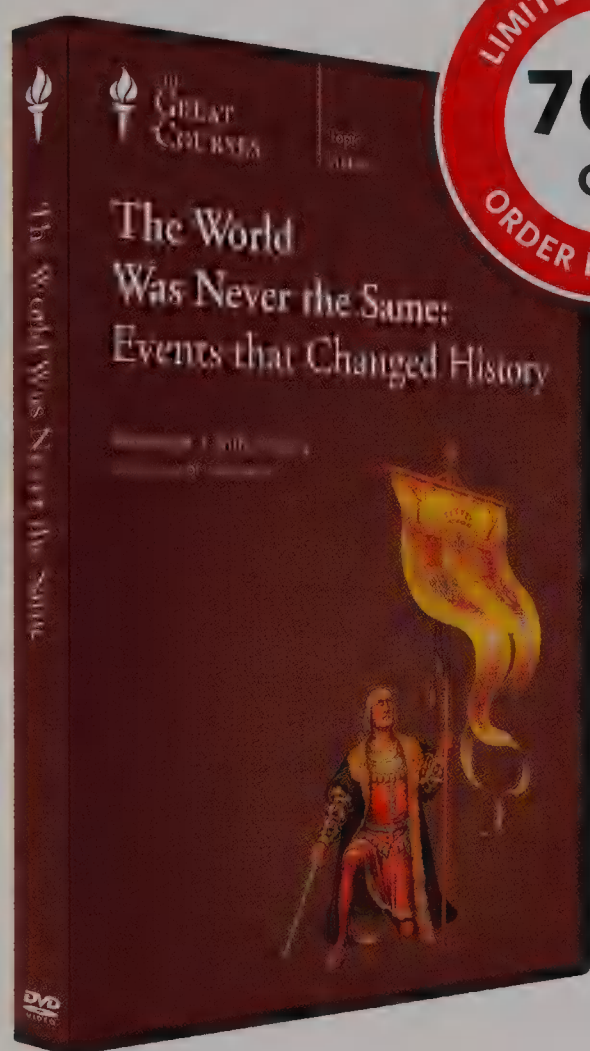
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HARPER'S INDEX

- Projected annual revenue Mexican drug cartels stand to lose from pot legalization in Colorado and Washington ■ \$1,400,000,000
- Estimated minimum amount the Zeta cartel makes each year from the sale of coal ■ \$22,000,000
- Minimum number of engineers and technicians it has kidnapped to run Radio Zeta and other telecommunications outlets ■ 21
- Percentage rate at which Arcata, California, plans to tax excessive electricity use in an effort to punish marijuana growers ■ 45
- Portion of California drivers on an average Saturday night who have potentially impairing drugs in their systems ■ 1/7
- Portion of the U.S. House of Representatives' Democratic caucus that represents California or New York ■ 1/3
- Amount that Crescent City, California, has budgeted for tsunami-defense construction ■ \$34,000,000
- Percentage of children living in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture who have thyroid abnormalities ■ 40
- Number of seconds the Long Island Power Authority spent discussing Hurricane Sandy in public meetings before the storm ■ 39
- Number of hours before power was restored to the majority of Long Island residents affected by the storm ■ 361
- Estimated feet by which Sandy shrank New Jersey's shoreline ■ 35
- Last full month in which the average daily temperature did not exceed twentieth-century norms ■ 2/1985
- Year by which the United States is projected to become the world's largest producer of oil ■ 2017
- Percentage of U.S. troops in Afghanistan who consume at least one energy drink per day ■ 45
- Percentage of those consuming three or more such drinks per day who "sometimes" or "often" fall asleep on the job ■ 44
- Date of the first combat death of a female U.S. service member in Iraq ■ 3/23/2003
- Date on which the U.S. Army began testing body armor designed for women ■ 8/20/2012
- Estimated cost of maintaining Afghanistan's national security forces in the year after U.S. troops leave ■ \$4,100,000,000
- Annual budget of the Afghan government ■ \$3,300,000,000 (see pages 51–52)
- Percentage of U.S. government contracts intended for small businesses that went to large corporations in 2011 ■ 37
- Portion of the total value of all U.S. currency accounted for by \$100 bills ■ 3/4
- By coins ■ 1/25
- Percentage by which an unemployed American is likelier to have a heart attack ■ 35
- By which an American in poverty is likelier to have suffered depression ■ 96
- Projected increase in the number of doctors in the U.S. health-care system by 2020 ■ 50,100
- In the number of patients ■ 36,000,000
- Pounds by which the average American's self-reported "ideal weight" has increased since 1990 ■ 13
- Chance that an average American ate at McDonald's yesterday ■ 1 in 12
- Value of the 220 diamonds swallowed by a South African jewel smuggler in November ■ \$265,000
- Average price for an ounce of human breast milk at a U.S. hospital ■ \$4
- Minimum number of pill capsules containing powdered human fetuses smuggled from China into South Korea since 2011 ■ 28,864
- Percentage of Americans who say China "can't be trusted" ■ 68
- Chance that an Israeli Jew believes Israel practices "apartheid" against Palestinians ■ 1 in 2
- Factor by which Northeasterners were more likely than Southerners to support racial integration in 1963 ■ 2.6
- By which they are more likely to support gay marriage today ■ 1.5
- Estimated number of roses the United States imports annually from Colombia and Ecuador for Valentine's Day ■ 184,830,000
- Cost to have the remains of a cremated pet set off in a fireworks display by an Australian circus performer ■ \$990
- Minimum number of years it will take to cross-breed an extinct species of Galapagos tortoise back into existence ■ 100
- Percentage of the world's supply of donkey cheese that the tennis player Novak Djokovic intends to buy ■ 100

Figures cited are the latest available as of December 2012. Sources are listed on page 41.

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6. Marathon—Democracy Triumphant (490 B.C.)
7. Hippocrates Takes an Oath (430 B.C.)
8. Caesar Crosses the Rubicon (49 B.C.)
9. Jesus—The Trial of a Teacher (A.D. 36)
10. Constantine I Wins a Battle (A.D. 312)
11. Muhammad Moves to Medina—The Hegira (A.D. 622)
12. Bologna Gets a University (1088)
13. Dante Sees Beatrice (1283)
14. Black Death—Pandemics and History (1348)
15. Columbus Finds a New World (1492)
16. Michelangelo Accepts a Commission (1508)
17. Erasmus—A Book Sets Europe Ablaze (1516)
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20. The Battle of Vienna (1683)
21. The Battle of Lexington (1775)
22. General Pickett Leads a Charge (1863)
23. Adam Smith (1776) versus Karl Marx (1867)
24. Charles Darwin Takes an Ocean Voyage (1831)
25. Louis Pasteur Cures a Child (1885)
26. Two Brothers Take a Flight (1903)
27. The Archduke Makes a State Visit (1914)
28. One Night in Petrograd (1917)
29. The Day the Stock Market Crashed (1929)
30. Hitler Becomes Chancellor of Germany (1933)
31. Franklin Roosevelt Becomes President (1933)
32. The Atomic Bomb Is Dropped (1945)
33. Mao Zedong Begins His Long March (1934)
34. John F. Kennedy Is Assassinated (1963)
35. Dr. King Leads a March (1963)
36. September 11, 2001

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READINGS

[Essay]

SMUGGLER NATION

By Peter Andreas, from his book out this month from Oxford University Press. Andreas is a professor of political science at Brown University.

The agents moved in to seize the shipment, but the traffickers turned on them, shooting the senior officer and torching his vehicle. With the local courts hopelessly compromised and corrupt, the outraged authorities wanted to extradite the perpetrators of this brazen crime. But this only made the outlaws more defiant and violent, and they were never caught.

This may sound like Tijuana or Juárez today, but the year was 1772, and the place was near my adopted hometown of Providence, Rhode Island. The ringleader of the attack, John Brown—a prominent local merchant whose business interests included smuggling, privateering, and slave trading—was one of the founders of the university that bears his family's name (and that happens to be my employer).

The incident came to be known as the Gaspee Affair, after the British customs vessel, the HMS *Gaspee*, that was stormed, looted, and burned by an armed group of local citizens in retaliation for Britain's crackdown on smuggling. The tiny colonial outpost had long been a hub of illicit trade, thanks to the geography of Narragansett Bay. Today, this episode is celebrated by local residents, who put on an annual festival, Gaspee Days, and proudly point to the showdown as Rhode Island's opening salvo in the American

Revolution. A plaque on South Main Street near downtown Providence commemorates the event. Gaspee Street is a few blocks away.

Of course, most Americans no longer celebrate illicit trade, and U.S. officials, like their British forebears, are increasingly preoccupied with fighting it. Transnational organized crime “poses a significant and growing threat to national and international security, with dire implications for public safety, public health, democratic institutions, and economic stability,” the White House declared in a 2011 report. Such pronouncements had been repeated in Washington policy circles since the 1990s, with U.S. Senator John Kerry exclaiming in 1997 that “America must lead an international crusade” against a growing global crime threat, and the pundit Moisés Naím labeling the conflict the new “wars of globalization.” Crime had gone global, Naím warned, “transforming the international system, upending the rules, creating new players, and reconfiguring power in international politics and economics.” These scary accounts contain many truths, but their neglect of the past grossly distorts our view of the present. Illicit globalization is not entirely new. Rather than posing a sudden threat, it is the

continuation of an American tradition that goes back centuries.

Take, for example, the War of Independence. Colonial merchants were leading players in the Atlantic smuggling economy—most notably the smuggling of West Indies molasses to New England distilleries—and conflicts over smuggling and customs enforcement played a critical role in the tensions leading up to the outbreak of war. Pivotal incidents and protests, such as the Boston Tea

Party, were closely connected to smuggling interests and the backlash against the Crown's militarized crackdowns. The first signer of the Declaration of Independence was one of Boston's best-known merchant-smugglers, John Hancock.

Smugglers put their transportation methods, skills, and networks to profitable use by covertly supplying George Washington's troops with arms and gunpowder. Motivated as much by profit as by patriotism, they also were recruited by Washington for his makeshift naval force. This was just one of a number of major American military conflicts, from trading with the enemy in the War of 1812 to blockade running during the American Civil War, in which success on the battlefield was tied to entrepreneurial success in the underworld of smuggling.

Smuggling also helped drive the American industrial revolution. Conveniently forgotten in today's intellectual-property debates is that early U.S. leaders such as Alexander Hamilton enthusiastically encouraged intellectual piracy and technology smuggling during the country's initial industrialization process, especially in the textile industry. Such smuggling also depended on the illicit importation of skilled workers (in violation of British emigration laws) to assemble, operate, and improve on the latest machinery. The most famous British artisan to move to America illegally was Samuel Slater—credited as the “father of the American industrial revolution”—who was then hired by Moses Brown (brother of John) to work on and perfect smuggled cotton-spinning machinery in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Only much later, once it was a major industrial power, did the United States become a forceful advocate for intellectual-property protections. In other words, the message to China and other countries today is “Do as I say, not as I did.”

The West was won not only through military conquest but also through illicit commerce. Many nineteenth-century Americans understood Manifest Destiny to include a divine right to smuggle. Smuggling of all sorts was at the forefront of the young nation's aggressive territorial expansion, including large-scale smuggling of alcohol into Indian country (illegally traded for much-coveted furs) and illicit slave trafficking for the rapidly expanding cotton plantations of the Deep South. The squatters who unlawfully settled on federal, Indian, and Mexican lands, often provoking violent confrontations, were the “illegal immigrants” of their time. Weak government enforcement made such frontier activities possible, and the extension and strengthening of the government's reach in turn often pushed them farther outward, to the new edges of the frontier. These borderland dynamics came at the expense of a decaying Spanish Empire, a newly independent Mexico, and ever-shrinking Indian lands. Frontier smugglers helped lay the groundwork for further territorial expansion and annexation.

There is nothing uniquely American about smuggling, of course. To varying degrees and in varying ways, all nations are smuggler nations. Some have even been smuggler empires; consider, for instance, the crucial role of opium smuggling in financing the British Empire in the nineteenth century. No so-called drug cartel today comes close to matching the power of the British East India Company, which in its heyday enjoyed a near monopoly on the China opium-smuggling trade. But the United States has the distinction of being one of the world's leading importers of smuggled goods and labor (because of the sheer size of its economy) as well as the world's leading antismuggling campaigner. It is also a leading smuggling source country, if one considers all the American guns, cigarettes, pirated software and entertainment, hazardous waste, and dirty dollars circulating around the globe.

The conventional account holds that there has been a dramatic upsurge in the volume of illicit trade in the past few decades. This may be true; after all, such trade would merely have to keep pace with the rest of the economy to grow at an impressive rate. But that does not mean this trade has necessarily increased as a percentage of overall global commerce. In fact, the liberalization of trade in recent decades has sharply reduced incentives to engage in smuggling practices designed to evade taxes and tariffs, which were historically a driving force of illicit commerce. Smuggling is increasingly about evading prohibitions and bans rather than import duties.

Tougher border enforcement is an easy sell in Washington, and every administration is vulnerable to the charge that it is not doing enough to “secure the border.” America has always had leaky borders, though, and attempts to seal them can backfire. Much of today's U.S.–Mexico drug-smuggling problem, for example, is an unintended consequence of the “successful” U.S. crackdown on Colombian cocaine trafficking through the Caribbean and South Florida in the 1980s, which pushed the cocaine trade to the Southwest and vastly increased the power and wealth of Mexican traffickers—with devastating consequences for Mexican society. Even if not always terribly effective, efforts to tighten government control force illicit traders to devise more creative and elaborate methods. With the border more heavily policed, for example, migrants now have little choice but to place their lives in the hands of professional smugglers, whose dangerous crossing strategies lead to hundreds of migrant deaths every year in the most remote and treacherous stretches of the border. We've seen these dynamics before. The Chinese Exclusion Act in the late nineteenth century pushed Chinese laborers to attempt clandestine entry through Canada and Mexico with the help of professional smugglers.



"Fife and Drum," a photograph by Tina Barney, whose work was on view in November at Janet Borden, Inc., in New York City.

Similarly, the squeeze on maritime alcohol smuggling off the East Coast during the Prohibition era helped to turn the U.S.-Canadian border into an even busier smuggling superhighway.

Today's narrative of governments "under siege" by illicit trade networks also conceals the fact that governments at times create and exploit these networks. State-sponsored illicit trade is not restricted to a handful of "rogue states" such as Iran and North Korea. During the Cold War years, the CIA exploited smuggling networks for a variety of purposes, among them funding and supplying insurgents around the globe, from Southeast Asia to Afghanistan to Central America. Washington gave a green light to arms-embargo busting in the Balkans in the 1990s, and in recent years has tolerated and sometimes even supported allegedly drug-connected Afghans allied in the fight against the Taliban and jihadists. These cases are variants of a practice that dates back at least to the War of 1812, when U.S. forces led by Andrew Jackson made a short-term alliance of convenience with the band of pirate-smugglers led by Pierre and Jean

Laffite in order to repel the British in the Battle of New Orleans. The Laffites were treated as heroes and granted presidential pardons for their patriotic assistance; they promptly returned to their old ways.

Bringing in history to re-evaluate illicit globalization helps us make sense of why we are where we are and even where we might be headed. We need to take a deep breath. Overblown accounts of illicit globalization too often lead to overly punitive prescriptions. The United States incarcerates more people for drug-law violations, for example, than Western Europe does for all offenses combined. Like the British in their crusade against the illicit slave trade in the nineteenth century, the United States leads a crusade of sorts against drugs—but whereas the former was about freeing people, the latter is about locking them up, with African Americans making up a disproportionate number of those behind bars.

In my undergraduate lecture class *The Politics of the Illicit Global Economy*, I ask students



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MORGAN LEHMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK CITY

Panic, a watercolor and graphite work on paper by Laura Ball, whose work was on view last month at David B. Smith Gallery, in Denver.

whether they have ever bought counterfeit goods; a majority of hands go up. I then ask how many have illegally downloaded or streamed movies or music, and almost all hands go up, which is perhaps to be expected. I don't ask them about illegal drugs, but I already know the answer. Campus polls suggest that pot is more popular than tobacco.

John Brown would be proud that the smuggler tradition remains alive and well. There were no drug prohibitions in his day and nothing remotely resembling pirated music and knockoff Gucci handbags, but pirated industrial technology would certainly be familiar, given that his brother Moses and others in his family invested quite a bit in it. John Brown would notice that Rhode Island is no longer the smuggling hub it was during his heyday. In the early years, Rhode Island's fiercely independent merchants smuggled in West Indies molasses to manufacture rum and were also leading slave traffickers, in flagrant defiance of state and federal laws. Today, however, Rhode Islanders participate in the smuggling economy mostly as consumers rather than producers or traders.

John Brown the illicit slave trader would surely be startled to see that a black woman had recently served as president of the university he helped found. The trade he so defiantly defended brought to America the ancestors of Brown University president Ruth Simmons—the first African-American president of an Ivy League institution, whose office was located in a university building built partly by slave labor. Simmons was praised for forming a Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice to examine the university's early links to slavery and slave trafficking, including John Brown's role. Yet Simmons was also the subject of controversy when it was reported that, as a board member of Goldman Sachs—which in 2010 paid a \$550 million fine to settle federal securities-fraud charges—she accepted millions of dollars in stock options and approved millions more in controversial bonuses for its widely reviled top executives at a time when the nation was undergoing a financial meltdown. Simmons's role at Goldman Sachs raised eyebrows across campus, provoked outrage in the *Providence Journal*, and drew the scrutiny of the business page of the *New York*

Times. She nevertheless survived the episode remarkably unscathed and is widely celebrated as Brown's most successful president.

By comparison, my students involved in the illegal economy are amateurs, but they are the ones the law criminalizes. Even though America remains a smuggler nation (as well as an ever-expanding police nation), it seems clear that curbing reckless behavior in the licit side of the economy is the country's most formidable challenge today. Policing efforts, while increasingly prominent, are noticeably selective in whom and what they target. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission is a tiny player in the massive federal criminal-justice bureaucracy. Despite the intensity of the financial crisis and its aftershocks, policing Wall Street remains a halfhearted sideshow compared with policing border smuggling. It is far easier, after all, to go after drug couriers and smuggled migrants than the speculators who made such extraordinary profits in the years leading up to the financial crisis. John Brown, who loathed government interference and made his fortune by blurring the lines between licit and illicit business, would be envious.

[Disguise]

SPYWEAR

From a November 19, 2012, blog post by John McAfee, the founder of the antivirus-software company McAfee, who in mid-November came under suspicion by Belizean police of murdering his neighbor Gregory Faull and was apprehended in Guatemala after evading arrest for three weeks. Sam is one of McAfee's girlfriends.

The first two days Sam and I were on the run, I felt helpless, especially given the fact that so many of our friends and workers were being arrested. I realized that unless I knew moment by moment what was happening, my chances of coming out of this intact, both emotionally and physically, were slim. My safety is contingent on the truth being discovered. After two days we returned to the house, in disguise, and I began my watch.

The first day I colored my full beard and my hair light gray—almost white. I darkened the skin of my face, neck, and hands with shoe polish and put on a Saints baseball cap with the brim facing backward and tufts of the front of my hair sticking out through the band. I stuffed my cheeks with chewed bubble gum, making

my face appear much fatter. I darkened and browned my front teeth. I stuffed a shaved-down tampon deep into my right nostril and dyed the tip dark brown, giving my nose an awkward, lopsided, disgusting appearance. I put on a pair of ragged brown pants with holes

[Decision]

NO TAX IN THE CHAMPAGNE ROOM

From the October 23, 2012, dissenting opinion of Judge Robert Smith in a case brought by the operators of Nite Moves, a strip club near Albany, against New York State's tax agency. Under the state's tax code, "dramatic or musical arts admission" charges are exempt from sales tax. In a 4–3 decision, the court upheld taxes on exotic dancing.

The ruling of the Tax Appeals Tribunal, which the majority upholds, makes a distinction between highbrow dance and lowbrow dance that is not to be found in the governing statute and raises significant constitutional problems. The Legislature used "choreographic" in its statutory definition of "dramatic or musical arts admission charge" merely as a synonym for "dance." Strictly speaking, it is true, not all dance is choreographed—some may be improvised—but it is absurd to suggest that the Legislature meant to tax improvised dance while leaving choreographed dance untaxed. In any event, the record shows that the performances here were largely planned, not improvised. Thus, the only question is whether the admission charges were paid for dance performances. There is not the slightest doubt that they were. The people who paid these admission charges paid to see women dancing. It does not matter whether the dance was artistic or crude, boring or erotic. Under New York's tax law, a dance is a dance. Like the majority, I find this particular form of dance unedifying—indeed, I am stuffy enough to find it distasteful. Perhaps for similar reasons, I do not read *Hustler* magazine; I would rather read *The New Yorker*. I would be appalled, however, if the state were to exact from *Hustler* a tax that *The New Yorker* did not have to pay on the grounds that what appears in *Hustler* is insufficiently "cultural and artistic."

patched and darned. I wore an old, ragged, long-sleeve shirt. I donned an old Guatemalan-style serape and toted a bag containing a variety of Guatemalan woven goods. I adjusted my posture so that I appeared a good six inches shorter than my actual height and slowly walked up and down the beach with a pronounced limp, pushing an old single-speed bicycle and peddling my wares to tourists and reporters using a broken English with a heavy Spanish accent. On my second day, I nearly sold a dolphin carving to an Associated Press reporter standing at the edge of my dock.

Among the people I spoke with that day was the caretaker at Mr. Faull's house. The police had stated that Mr. Faull's housekeeper discovered the body. His caretaker told me that Faull did not have a housekeeper. He himself discovered the body, he said. I found this interesting and filed it away as a piece of data that might help at some point. Why would the police lie about this? Lies always have a reason. Then I watched the police dig up my four dogs that had been poisoned and buried. They cut off the heads and reburied the bodies. I found this curious. The dogs had been dead too long for an effective autopsy. What was this all about? I watched the police search my residence seven times. At one point I got too close and was angrily ordered to go away. I did so while muttering "*Pendejos!*" loud enough for the officers to hear. On two occasions the police carried large duffel-type bags into the premises and left with the bags appearing nearly empty. Perhaps the bags contained their lunch, and they ate while searching. Perhaps not.

On subsequent days, using different disguises, I did the same general thing, one day selling tamales and burritos that I had purchased wholesale from a real vendor; on another pretending to be a drunk German tourist with a partially bandaged face wearing Speedo swimming trunks and a distasteful, oversize Hawaiian shirt and yelling loudly at anyone who would listen, "*Leck mich am Arsch!*" What I discovered is that the police are more concerned with finding me than with catching Mr. Faull's killer. I will continue my investigations, since the police seem to have defaulted on this obligation. I have offered a reward. If anyone has any information, please give it directly to me. I will publish it here on this blog first, then provide it to the police. That way it cannot just conveniently disappear if it is evidence the government finds distasteful.

p.s. No one at the house, including the staff, knows that I am nearby. If the police are reading this, do not randomly round up everyone for harboring a fugitive. Please.

[Complaints]

OSLO DISCORD

From a twenty-seven-page letter by Anders Behring Breivik sent last October to corrections officials in Norway. Breivik is currently serving a twenty-one-year sentence in a maximum-security prison near Oslo for murdering seventy-seven people in 2011. Translated from the Norwegian by Julia Grønnevet.

I quickly realized that the rubber safety pen isn't functional enough for extensive writing. I therefore asked for access to a pencil and a ballpoint pen. I was refused verbally. The rubber pen enables the writing of approximately five to ten words per minute and precludes editing. A pencil or ballpoint pen with an eraser enables the writing of ten to fifteen words per minute and allows for editing. A digital typewriter enables the writing of approximately forty-five words per minute. So despite the fact that I am a writer by profession, I have been afflicted with a serious practical handicap by being denied access to a functional writing tool. The rubber pen is ergonomically misshapen and causes pains in my hand after a short use. If it were theoretically possible to develop rheumatism I'm sure the rubber pen could cause this. It's a nightmare of a tool, and I get very frustrated using it.

As a container of moisturizer is not permitted in the cell, moisturizer must be requested through the calling system. The container is not handed over; instead, the product is portioned out into a small plastic cup I may possess temporarily. The frustration is heightened by the fact that five to ten portions are poured into the cup even though I need only one. This means that the remaining four to nine portions go to waste. This is very annoying.

At mealtimes I must state the quantity of sandwich toppings I'd like with my bread as I'm not allowed packaged food in the cell. The problem is that the portion of butter is sometimes too small, so I have enough for only three to four slices of bread. This causes unnecessary irritation, as one finds oneself in a scenario where one either eats dry bread or feels guilty for requesting more butter through the calling system.

I am not allowed to keep my own clothes in my cell. This means that wardens must go and fetch clothes for me from the storage facility based on the descriptions I give them. As the cell is frequently chilly, I usually wear a heavyweight jacket-type sweater at all times. There are three garments I rotate for this purpose, and all of them are casual-wear items that see so much use they

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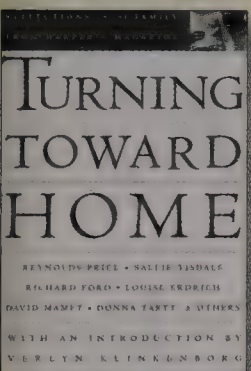
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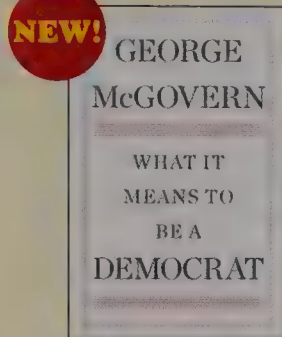
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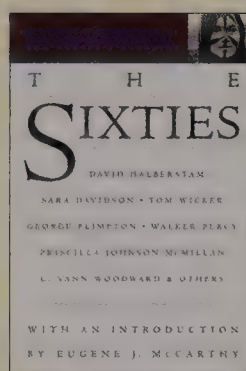
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for delivery.

[Poetry]

RED EXCERPTS

By Anne Carson, from *Red Doc*,
to be published next month by Knopf.

TIME PASSES TIME
does not pass. Time all
but passes. Time usually
passes. Time passing and
gazing. Time has no gaze.
Time as perseverance.
Time as hunger. Time in
a natural way. Time when
you were six the day a
mountain. Mountain time.
Time I don't remember.
Time for a dog in an alley
caught in the beam of your
flashlight. Time not a
video. Time as paper
folded to look like a
mountain. Time smeared
under the eyes of the
miners as they rattle down
into the mine. Time if you
are bankrupt. Time if you
are Prometheus. Time if
you are all the little tubes
on the roots of a gorse
plant sucking greenish
black moistures up into
new scribbled continents.
Time it takes for the postal
clerk to apply her lipstick
at the back of the post
office before the
supervisor returns. Time
it takes for a cow to tip
over. Time in jail. Time
as overcoats in a closet.
Time for a herd of turkeys
skidding and surprised on
ice. All the time that has
soaked into the walls here.
Time between the little
clicks. Time compared to
the wild fantastic silence
of the stars. Time for
the man at the bus stop
standing on one leg to tie
his shoe. Time taking
Night by the hand and
trotting off down the road.

Time passes oh boy. Time
got the jump on me yes it
did.

HE BRINGS LILACS
from the bush by the
corner of her house to
which she will probably
not return this time. Or
ever and he leans his face
into them. The smell
plunges up. A vertical
smell. Wet purple
unvanquished. Her door is
shut. The ceiling tracks
flicker. No radios no
barbecues don't honk a
sign he saw on the way to
the hospital his mind
running like a dog off
its chain. Certain things
not decided have been
decided. He arrived on
the day after her surgery.
Has seen this corridor at
all hours. Notices again a
hesitancy in the light as if
it were trying not to shock
you with how scant it is.
He can hear the oxygen
machine through the door.
It shunts on. Runs awhile.
Shunts off. He enters.

WHEN HE IS there they
lift the stones together.
The stones are her lungs.

NOT A CASUAL
solitude. He and she.
Oxygen machine is
wheeled in and hooked
up. Her eyelids flutter but
do not open. He sits. The
room is hot. There is a
smell. Does Proust have a
verb for this. This
struggle she faces now her

onetime terrible date with
Night. First date last date
soulmate. Old song lyrics
scamper in him. He moves
the chair back to the
window. She's counting
my soulmate gasps of
make my heart beat at a
fast rate. Oxygen. He
dozes. Waking to her avid
gaze. Wide open. She
holds in one hand the
makeup mirror in the
other a pair of tweezers.
Here she whispers. Lifts
tweezers. Maybe you can
do it. Taps the end of her
chin. He hesitates shrugs
pulls up his chair takes the
makeup mirror and peers
close. A beard of very
tiny white translucent
hairs all over her chin. He
moves the oxygen tube
aside and gingerly plucks
a few. Plucks a few more.
There are hundreds
thousands. He hates
waiting for her to wince
she doesn't wince. It's
alright Ma you can hardly
see them he says. Her
eyes fall. Okay never
mind. Sadly she takes
the tweezers back. I look
awful don't I. No you look
like my Ma. Now she
winces. In later years this
is the one memory he
wishes would go away and
not come back. And the
reason he cannot bear her
dying is not the loss of her
(which is the future) but
that dying puts the two of
them (now) into this
nakedness together that is
unforgivable. They do not
forgive it. He turns away.
This roaring air in his
arms. She is released.

become very worn. There are often issues when I ask for one of these garments. For some reason they often bring me a dressy Lacoste sweater instead, despite the fact that I've informed them several times that I don't want one of these, as they are valuable and must be treated delicately to avoid wear. I have sufficient self-awareness to acknowledge that I'm stubborn and principled in this area, and, like many Norwegians, I have an aversion to exposing luxury items to unnecessary wear and tear.

[Memorial]

OUR MAN IN JABBERLON

From a September 12, 2012, post by The Mittani, a member of the Goonswarm alliance in the role-playing game Eve Online, on a website that provides news about the fictional world of the game. Vile Rat was the alias used in the game by Sean Smith, a State Department official killed in the September 11 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya.

We knew that Vile Rat was in Benghazi; he told us. He was *in situ* to provide IT services for the consulate, which meant he was on the Net all the time, hanging out with us on Jabber and talking about Internet spaceship games. The last time he did something like this, he was in Baghdad in 2007 or 2008. He would be on Jabber, then say something like “incoming” and vanish for a while as the Katyushas came down from Sadr City (State had been in the former Saddam Hussein palace on the Tigris before they built that \$2 billion fortress-embassy). He got out of Baghdad physically unscathed and had some more relaxing postings after that. Montreal, then The Hague.

If you play this stupid game, you may not realize it, but you play in a galaxy created in large part by Vile Rat's talent as a diplomat. No one focused as relentlessly on using diplomacy as a strategic tool. Mercenary Coalition flipped sides in the Great War largely because of Vile Rat's influence, and if that hadn't happened, GSF probably would never have taken out BoB. Jabberlon5? VR made it. You may not even know what Jabberlon5 is, but it's the smoke-filled Jabber room where every nullsec personage of note hangs out and makes deals. Goonswarm has succeeded over the years in large part because of VR's emphasis on diplomacy. He created an entire section with a staff of 10+ called Corps Diplomatique, something no other alliance has. He had the vision and the understanding to

see three steps ahead of everyone else—in the game and when giving real-world advice.

Vile Rat was a spy for the Goonfleet Intelligence Agency. He infiltrated Lotka Volterra; he and I cooked up a scheme where we faked VR blowing up one of Sorenson's haulers full of zydrine in Syndicate—this was back in '06 when zydrine mattered—and that proved to Lotka Volterra that he had gone “fuck goons.” BoB invaded Syndicate, and shortly thereafter, GSF went to Insmother, allied with Red Alliance, and plowed over Lotka Volterra's territory, all with Vile Rat's aid. He came back in from the cold and became one of the most key players in the GSF directorate. His influence over the grand game and the affairs of nullsec cannot be overstated. If you were an alliance leader of any consequence, you spoke to Vile Rat. You knew him.

He was on Jabber when it happened—that's the most fucked-up thing. In Baghdad the same kind of thing happened—incoming sirens, he'd vanish, we'd freak out, and he'd come back okay after a bit. This time he said “FUCK” and “GUN-FIRE” and then disconnected and never returned.

Then the major media began reporting on the consulate and embassy attacks in Libya and Egypt and I freaked out, and then it turned out that it was my friend of six years who'd helped build this alliance into what it is today, starting out as one of my agents and growing to become the single most influential diplomat in the history of Eve.

I'm clearly in shock as I write this, as everything is buzzing around my head funnily and I feel kind of dead inside. I'm not sure if this is how I'm supposed to react to my friend being killed by a mob in postrevolutionary Libya, but it's pretty awful and Sean was a great guy and he was a goddamned master at this game we all play. It seems kind of trivial to praise a husband, father, and overall badass for his skills in an Internet spaceship game, but that's how most of us know him, so there you go.

R.I.P., my friend.

[Fiction]

THAT DOUBLING IS ALWAYS OBSERVED

By Robert Leonard Reid, from Issue 76 of AGNI. Reid is the author of several books, including, most recently, Arctic Circle.

ON THE KUPUESTRA

It is not supple. It communicates nothing. The kupuestra is mute; brittle; many-cornered, the

[Iconography]

MARTYR COMPLEX

From emails received by Michael D'Antuono in response to his painting The Truth, which depicts President Barack Obama in a crucifixion-like pose and wearing a crown of thorns. D'Antuono originally planned to show the painting in New York City in 2009, but after receiving more than 4,000 emails about the work, he canceled the exhibition. The Truth appeared publicly for the first time last October at the Bunker Hill Community College Art Gallery, in Boston.

The Truth is a nice painting, but I fear that the thorned crown will only embolden those who criticize his supposed image as some religious "Savior" for those of us who support him.

Americans need to view Obama professionally. Typical atheist pig. Doesn't believe in the real Jesus so thinks Obama is God. Just like artists in Germany got money to help Hitler.

What's next? Something glorifying the gulags?

The truth is your picture is blasphemous. Not only is Obama not Christlike, he is closer to Lucifer. How could someone who thinks he is God possibly believe in someone else as the Son of God?

I don't know you at all, but chances are that you are angry at God, probably gay, and probably had a lonely or abusive childhood.

You ROCK! Best political piece of art I've ever seen. I can't stand Obama, but I'd absolutely love to own this masterpiece.

We're twenty years removed from Serrano's *Piss Christ*. Once you've drenched the Son of God in urine, merely proclaiming the president to be a suit-clad messiah is a bit boring.

Love it. Shows what he thinks he is, but is the exact opposite. You nailed it, literally.

I find it most amusing that you used acrylic rather than a true medium like oils or watercolor—but then what better way to depict the false, self-proclaimed Messiah?

A noose around his neck instead of thorns on his head would have made this stupid fucking painting a lot better.

The truth is that you have deliberately manufactured an image to be visually provocative yet politically ambiguous. It is content-free. The image contains no "truth."

My father told me of your painting today over lunch. One of his first comments was, "I can't imagine he'd be willing to pose for something like that."

body as polygon; the choreographic equivalent of Ak-Mak crackers but without the sesame seeds. It is performed without music. It is performed without face or torso. It does not arouse the passions in the manner of, say, the tango. It does not stir the heart, the pathetic object of that old wadded-up valentine the waltz. The kupuestra is not old. It is not wadded-up. Like weeping, it is colorless. Like Tuesday, it has no scent. Most performances (not all) go unnoticed. The great artists of the medium (save one: see ON LOP, below) are unknown; all owe their anonymity to their unwholesome pallors and pretzel bones; all die before the age of forty. (This last is an inference. What we know with certainty is that no artist of the medium past the age of forty has been observed.) Because of the way the heels are brought together, then snapped violently into the inner thighs and locked there (*enremmeta*, "as if kissing the private parts") in the dance's most recognizable kinetic, the critic Eugene Genova has compared the kupuestra to the communal dining of jackals (which begins at the entrails and moves skinward) and labeled it savage and reprobate.

Genova is misguided. The kupuestra is not savage, and its merits are obvious. It is a dance for our time.

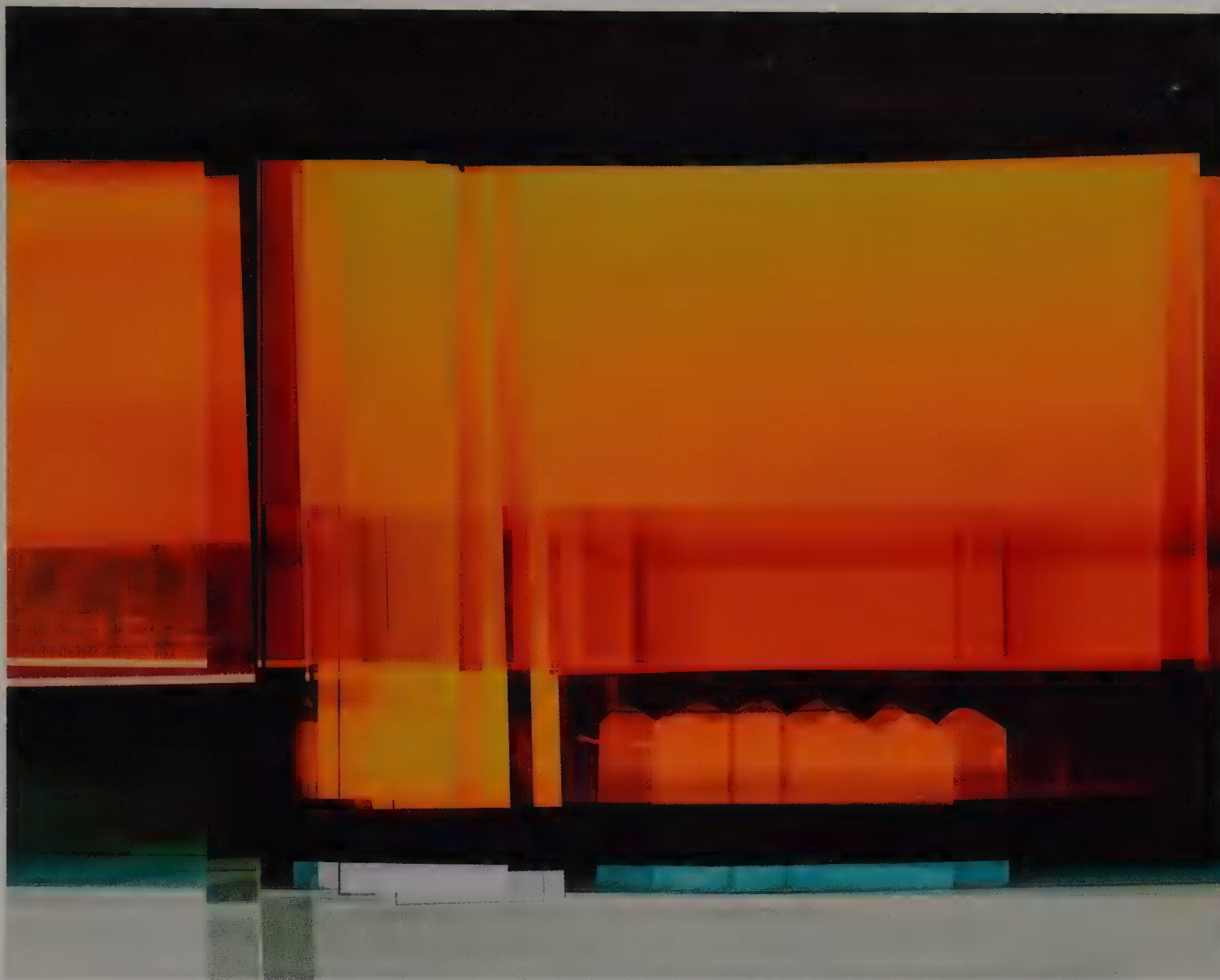
ON EARLY TRAINING

Children are chosen for the academy at age three. The principal criteria for acceptance are an unfathomable facial expression, skin of a dreadful hue, want of ambition, and a willingness to be placed in *enremmeta* and to remain so without complaint. During the audition, the applicant is suspended from cables to test for infirmity of purpose—"like a dead marionette," as Genova famously put it.

Children remain at the academy until they have nothing more to forget. They train intensively, usually at night, gradually advancing through twelve degrees of ignorance. Communication with parents is forbidden. Snacks and bicycles are forbidden. On completion of their studies, students are awarded monogrammed napkins and sent packing. Most are never heard from again. What they do with their training, or their napkins, is unknown (exception: see ON LOP'S NAPKIN, below).

ON PERFORMANCE

"Performance" is the wrong word. The kupuestra is *come into*. It is *assumed*. Imagine wool. Imagine Emily Dickinson asleep. Such images convey the lumbering poetry of the dance—its arrested couplets, its elevation of inertness to a majestic level. Once *enremmeta* is achieved, nothing remains. Genova has, predictably, attempted comment, without success. Between stanzas short bursts are permitted, as the dancer moves blindly



"Els Colors," an analog C-print on Diasac by Ola Kolehmainen, whose work was on view last November at Paris Photo.

along the collapsing boundaries, clueless as to the outcome. And then it is over—or not, as the case may be, depending on many things.

Solos are not unheard of, but true kupuestra jigsaws and so requires clusters. The ideal setting for an assumption is a pit or a quarry, or any brown place without trees. Observers go there single file. They surround it. What they see they shrug off at once.

ON VEKNER

Edward Vekner was the father of the kupuestra, albeit an unwitting one, a man whose understanding of the dance did not exceed a lizard's understanding of algebra. He once admitted that until he was twenty he believed that motion on the dance floor was a tidal phenomenon brought on by the gravitational pull of the moon. Vekner's passion was hayrides. As a child he dreamed he would one day ride a hay bale into battle. This never happened. Instead,

he became a designer of cemeteries. (Genova provides a plausible explanation for the farcical trajectory from military hayrider to graveyard architect: the flip side of a live soldier atop a heap of alfalfa is a dead one beneath a field of poppies.) The cemetery designer does the best he can with a bad situation, and Vekner assuredly did that. However shallow his understanding of the dance, his landscapes were wide, his holes dark and deep.

ON VEKNER'S EPIPHANY

Vekner didn't know a two-step from a turnip, but he had a pair of eyes and he knew what to do with them. Business took him to Reefmeer. There he happened to meet Hepple, the well-known foundation excavator. During their conversation, which began vaguely and continued ambiguously, Hepple mentioned the mass grave recently discovered on the Aupuene and offered to show it to his new friend.

The following morning found the two men traipsing toward the site along with hundreds of townsfolk. As they reached the spot, a depression that was neither large nor small, nor was it medium, they shambled along the lip, circling, until all had found suitable vantage points. There they paused and gawked.

What is there to say? It rose up. It was there. It was stately, in a way, but with zing. It was a kind of too much (but not totally). Interlocking could be inferred. At the summit of the pile was Enremmeta, a house painter. Hepple remarked on the doubling back of the legs, heel

[Memorial]

SURF, TURF, AND GRIEF

From an October 26 letter from Dina Kourda to Joe Dillman, the street-maintenance superintendent in Irvine, California.

As a concerned citizen of Irvine, I am writing today on behalf of PETA to ask for your approval to place a memorial sign on the public right-of-way as a tribute to the hundreds of fish who died as a result of a traffic collision this month. Although such signs are traditionally reserved for human fatalities, I hope you'll make an exception because of the enormous suffering involved in this case in order to remind drivers that all animals—whether they're humans, basset hounds, or bass—value their lives and feel pain.

I propose that the sign read, IN MEMORY OF HUNDREDS OF FISH WHO SUFFERED AND DIED AT THIS SPOT, and that it be placed at the intersection of Walnut and Yale Avenues to memorialize the fish who spilled onto the roadway and suffocated or died from injuries after a truck carrying them collided with another vehicle. The proposed sign would also remind tractor-trailer drivers of their responsibility to the thousands of animals who are hauled to their deaths every day.

Research tells us that fish use tools, tell time, sing, and have impressive long-term memories and complex social structures, yet fish used for food are routinely crushed, impaled, cut open, and gutted, all while still conscious. Sparing them from being tossed from a speeding truck and slowly dying from injuries and suffocation seems the least we can do. Thank you for your consideration.

to thigh, and mentioned that the pose had been seen at the summit of other such piles.

Vekner felt a crushing pain in his chest. Struggling for air, he stumbled back to his room, aware that his life was in danger. After the Aupuehe he traveled to Juulena, then Dalveddian, then Meriol. At the time, few such piles were known. Driven underground like a common thimblerrigger, the poor man was forced to abandon his family, his business, his golden retriever, to come into his life's work fortified only by emergency rations of bewilderment and chagrin.

Had he lived today, in our time of a kind of too much, when every cardiopulmonary system is engaged and every town has its pile, he might have been spared much grief and been led to his celebrated discovery in short order. As it happened, seven years were to erode beneath his feet before he had seen what he had seen and resurfaced to announce his astonishing findings: that whatever the why, that however the unraveling, that whenever the inquiry, that wherever the gawking, that whomever the heap—that doubling back of the legs, heel to thigh, is *always* observed. And this: that although he knew nothing of the dance, he knew it was like a dance.

ON WHAT HAPPENED TO VEKNER NEXT

He did not end up in a pile himself. The man enjoyed a brief celebrity. After the fuss he returned to his family, his business, and his golden retriever, welcomed by all except the last, which sniffed at him as she might have addressed a new hassock in the family room. There were commissions, consultations, a tiny award for good grooming. He was invited to snip the ribbon at the ground-breaking for the academy. He developed pains in his legs, the lingering hoofprint of an old hayride injury. Chiropractic produced a quick cure. Life went on and then it didn't. At an age too soon Vekner went blind, then mad. On the fifth day of the fourth month of his thirty-seventh year, he choked to death attempting to swallow his tongue. He ended up in one of his own cemeteries, beneath a stone reading: ABOVEGROUND AT LAST.

ON LOP

Lop was a many-angled Cremeran. The kupuestra was made for her, or her for it, or something. Thousands have danced; only Lop sank in. She was unfathomable, she was crackerlike, she was the color of bacon grease, yet she was not shrugged off. Old-timers recall not wool but Lop at the top—spindly needle-nailed fingers scratching at the sky, horned hips, notched brow, sawtooth chest zagging against the breathless frozen-night drift of the moon. The remembered usually defy convention. Lop defied astrophysics. There



Birds of America, Plate 65; Wood Duck [Summer or Wood Duck], a collage by Balint Zsako, from a new series of works made using images from John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*.

was always a moon, or Antares, or a frolicking galaxy when she danced, even on the stage at the local civic center. Vellone, who loved her, wrote of Lop in *enremmeta*—

crooked as a cow path but floating in a spiral
nebula of pink argon
but

Others who danced embodied earth. Lop embodied space. Therein lay her secret. Even in an airless cluster she found elbow room. Even in *enremmeta* she became void. The *kupuestra* communicates nothing, and Lop did not say that void is good or that it is chilly or even that it contains fish. Void with good or with trout is not void. Lop said that void is void. If you insist on meaning you are as misguided as Genova (who hated Lop and *really* hated Vellone, whose saccharine rhapsodies he compared to frilly underpants); but here, try this: Lop said that void is void, by which she meant that sooner or later you will end up in a hole in the ground, but relax, it won't be as bad as you imagine, because a hole can contain nothing—not you, not fish—so that wherever you are must be somewhere. If you find this exegesis comforting, fine, but you are missing the point; if you find it mindless, well done, you are floating in a spiral nebula of pink argon but.

ON LOP'S BIRTH

It would be stirring to relate that Lop arrived on Earth in an empty envelope from the planet

Zook, but it would also be untrue. She arrived on Earth in the normal fashion—screaming, flailing, seething, burning for revenge; the unfathomable, crackerlike, grease-colored daughter of two frightened parents who had expected a bundle of joy but instead received what appeared to be an enraged porcupine. The child would not be calmed. From behind a hastily constructed barricade, a recent medical-school graduate assured the small, bewildered parents that, like all thorny babies, little Lop would grow up to run a successful business; within five minutes, moreover, she would succumb happily to warm milk and a bath, at which time the pricklers would retract and contented cooing commence.

All of which was, of course, wishful thinking—more wishful than thinking, as it turned out. The recent medical-school graduate was wrong. Lop never cooed. The pricklers never retracted.

The child's most notable feature, even including her color, her consistency, and her rage, was a halo. Cerulean in hue, murky as the Lotus of the True Law, it surrounded her little spiked head not as Giotto or Cimabue might have installed it—like a ring of Saturn—but instead cubically, like a packing box for a Rand McNally globe. Within, she wailed.

ON LOP'S NAPKIN

She made of it a small boat. This upon departing the academy at an advanced age, still struggling to achieve even elementary ignorance. It

was decided that although she hadn't forgotten everything (she had, in fact, forgotten nothing), she had forgotten as much as she was capable of forgetting, and had therefore, technically, fulfilled the requirements for release. At a festive snack with the institution's spiritual director—a descendent of Vekner's—Lop was presented with her own napkin, which was buff-colored and heptagonal. She immediately folded it into a replica of a slave galley. Beneath the monogrammed "L" she drew a poor sketch of herself in enremmeta. Then, in tiny letters, she wrote:

If you find me
Look right through me
I am nothing
If you are folded, decrease
If you are cleaved, depart
Follow nothing

[Desecration]

MARXIST ECONOMICS

From a complaint filed September 7, 2012, by Stephanie Kirschner and Brad J. Kane against the owners and operators of Eden Memorial Park, a cemetery in Mission Hills, California.

In or about April 1979, Jeanine Kane, plaintiffs' mother, was inurned at Eden Memorial Park in a niche in the cemetery. The niche was adjacent to the niche of the famous comedian and film and television star Julius Henry "Groucho" Marx.

In September 2011, plaintiffs' father passed away. On or about September 9, plaintiffs met with Mr. Nathan Samuels, an employee working at Eden Memorial Park, to make arrangements for their father. Mr. Samuels showed plaintiffs a proposed niche for their father. They were also shown where the proposed niche for their father was relative to the location of plaintiffs' mother's niche. The niche Mr. Samuels pointed to was not adjacent to that of "Groucho" Marx.

Plaintiffs believe and allege that defendants knew that a niche that was closer to Mr. Marx's would have a certain prestige and higher value. Thus, plaintiffs believe that defendants moved their mother's remains in order to resell the niche closer to Mr. Marx's remains at a considerable profit. Defendants have caused plaintiffs substantial emotional distress that no member of civilized society should be forced to endure.

Seek the nothing in all things
(Signed) a dancer, but

Then she excused herself, went into the bathroom, tossed the little boat into the toilet, and flushed. The vessel descended with a choking sound, as though there were passengers on board. It passed quickly through the town's sewer system and out to sea. For seven years the craft plied the world's oceans, seven years of valor and fury. At last it made land—at a beach near Fendago, where Vellone, an unpublished poet, retrieved it.

Reading the message the old man was greatly cheered. He had sought nothing his entire life! The napkin still carried Lop's many-cornered scent and her depth. Pickled by the pungent vapors, bewitched by the abyss, the man who sought nothing determined now to continue his quest by setting out to find the boat's builder. Her scent led him quickly to the city of Kantrice, her depth to a bakery, where he located the object of his search in enremmeta, floating in a spiral nebula of pink argon but.

In accordance with Lop's wishes, he saw right through her. He saw a priest with a yo-yo. He saw a mountain wearing a hat. He saw a drawer full of vanilla beans. He saw, above everything, a rainbow advertising hiking boots. These were not drug dreams or chimeras: Lop's universe was hung thick with them! They were Arcturus and the Pleiades. They were the quarks and the leptons in void. They were the benevolence of the woman, the reassurance that it is never as bad as you imagine.

Vellone watched for as long as shapelessness allowed. Then he began to write.

ON LOP'S FINAL YEARS

Vellone's little collection, *That Doubling Is Always Observed*, sold eleven copies. Lop claimed that the author had mistaken the artist for her art; Vellone did not respond. In the city of Kantrice, needless to say, he had become the why. He was discovered there, years later, in enremmeta.

Lop's edges, meanwhile, transmogrified; she remembered things she had never known; her legs straightened; she walked by the sea, enchanted.

One day she decided to take off her halo. She placed it on the beach beside something narrow yet smooth. The excellence of the halo was carried off by the next storm, but no matter: a yellow skiff came in sight, searching for things to rescue. Lop waded out to greet the craft. She received a hearty welcome from the captain and the crew. And soon they departed on the April tide. Like Vekner, she was thirty-seven. Like Vellone, she watched for as long as shapelessness allowed. She is somewhere, with the others. ■

Chicago Doctor Invents Affordable Hearing Aid

Outperforms Many Higher Priced Hearing Aids

Reported by J. Page

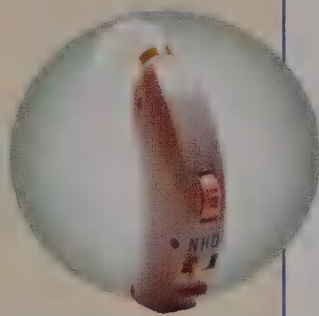
CHICAGO: A local board-certified Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT) physician, Dr. S. Cherukuri, has just shaken up the hearing aid industry with the invention of a medical-grade, affordable hearing aid. **This revolutionary hearing aid is designed to help millions of people with hearing loss who cannot afford—or do not wish to pay—the much higher cost of traditional hearing aids.**

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Dr. Cherukuri knew that untreated hearing loss could lead to depression, social isolation, anxiety, and symptoms consistent with Alzheimer's dementia. **He could not understand why the cost for hearing aids was so high when the prices on so many consumer electronics like TVs, DVD players, cell phones and digital cameras had fallen.**

Since Medicare and most private insurance do not cover the costs of hearing aids, which traditionally run between \$2000-\$6000 for a pair, many of the doctor's patients could not afford the expense. Dr. Cherukuri's goal was to find a reasonable solution that would help with the most common types of hearing loss at an affordable price, not unlike the **"one-size-fits-most" reading glasses** available at drug stores.

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He evaluated numerous hearing devices and sound amplifiers, including those seen on television. Without fail, almost all of these were found to amplify bass/low frequencies (below 1000 Hz) and not useful in amplifying the frequencies related to the human voice.

Inspiration from a surprising source

The doctor's inspiration to defeat the powers-that-be that kept inexpensive hearing aids out of the hands of the public actually came from a new cell phone he had just purchased. **"I felt that if someone could devise an affordable device like an iPhone® for about \$200 that could do all sorts of things, I could create a hearing aid at a similar price."**

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*"I have a \$2,000 Resound Live hearing aid in my left ear and the MDHearingAid PRO® in the right ear. **I am not able to notice a significant difference in sound quality between the two hearing aids.**" —Dr. May, ENT physician*

*"We ordered two hearing aids for my mother on Sunday, and the following Wednesday they were in our mailbox! **Unbelievable!** Now for the best part—they work so great, my mother says she hasn't heard so good for many years, even with her \$2,000 digital! **It was so great to see the joy on her face.** She is 90 years young again." —Al Peterson*

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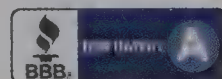
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THIS LAND IS NOT YOUR LAND

Deciding who belongs in America
By Ted Genoways

Five days a week, after his last batch of untrimmed hams has been deboned, injected with a sodium solution, and sent down the line to be cooked, Raul Vazquez walks out of the Hormel plant on the outskirts of Fremont, Nebraska, and crosses the street to the employee parking lot. He drives west along U.S. Route 30 for the better part of an hour, paralleling the Union Pacific's tracks and the Platte River. Finally, he arrives at the town of Schuyler, where he and his wife, Miguela, run a small liquor store. Until a few years ago, Vazquez and his family lived close to the plant in Fremont, but then the town changed in ways that made it impossible for them to stay.

In the past twenty years, roughly 3,000 Hispanics have arrived in Fremont—an increase from 0.7 per-

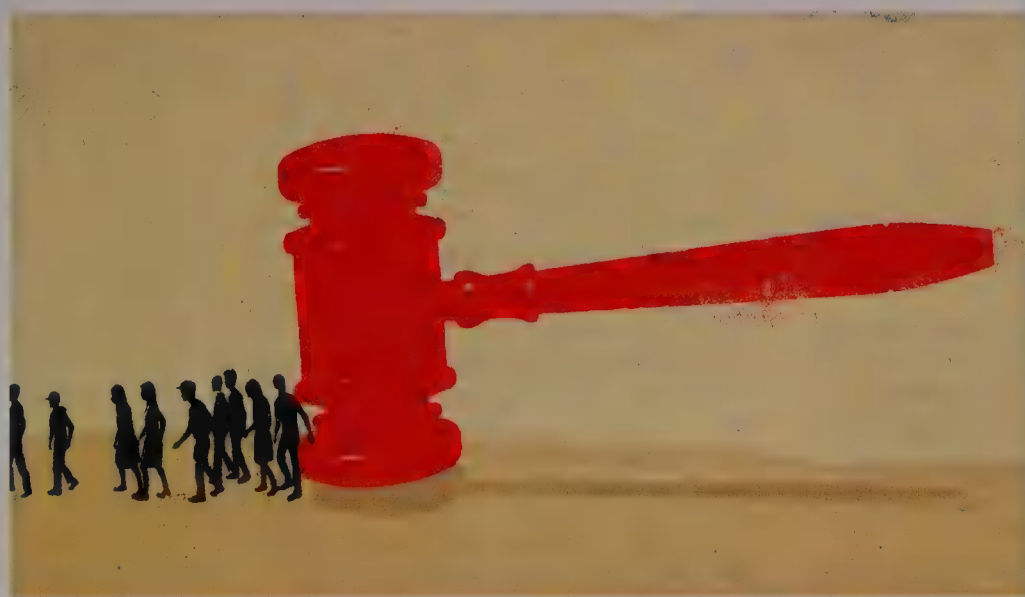
Ted Genoways is the author of two books of poems and of Walt Whitman and the Civil War.

cent to nearly 12 percent of the total population. Latino immigrants have saved the economies of the towns of northeast Nebraska from ruin, but many older residents feel

In May 2008, the Fremont City Council, following the lead of several towns around the country, proposed a law imposing penalties on businesses that hired and landlords who rented to

anyone who could not provide proof of citizenship. Similar ordinances have been thrown out by the courts for infringing on federal authority, but a few have survived—and nearly all of those were written with the aid of Kris Kobach, a former Department of Justice attorney who, under John Ashcroft, coauthored a memo contending that

local and state police could arrest undocumented aliens for violating immigration law. Since leaving the Justice Department in 2003, Kobach has advanced this doctrine by arguing that state and local governments have “inherent authority” to enforce federal mandates. On this controversial legal premise, Kobach has helped draft anti-immigration laws for such towns as



threatened by these new arrivals. Spots on the line at Hormel were once the most coveted jobs in the area, but now they are occupied largely by undocumented immigrants willing to work twice as fast for lower pay. The workers who got pushed aside, many of them second- or third-generation Hormel employees, are angry.



Hazleton, Pennsylvania; Valley Park, Missouri; and Farmers Branch, Texas, and for the state legislatures of Arizona and Alabama.

Kobach has continued his localized approach even as the national narrative on the subject has changed. After President Obama won re-election with 71 percent of the Latino vote, the national leadership of the Republican Party began openly contemplating a compromise on immigration reform. Kobach has called this reversal “pure political calculation” and vowed to match any policy liberalization by the federal government with continued measures at the state and local levels. And it’s in towns like Fremont—ensconced in conservative strongholds like Nebraska—that he is finding his most steadfast support.

During the Second World War, Hormel grew quickly by supplying

Spam-filled K rations to the military. When the soldiers came home, they began buying meat in unprecedented quantities. Prices climbed so high that the mayor of New York City called for an investigation, but the *New York Times* concluded that price-fixing wasn’t to blame. “Americans are meat-hungry,” the reporter explained. “There are just more persons consuming more meat than ever before in the history of the country.”

In 1947, Hormel acquired the Fremont Packing Company, a small plant about forty miles northwest of Omaha on the Burlington Northern and Union Pacific railroads, and expanded its production line from around fifty workers to more than 600. At a time when the average farmer was earning just under \$2,000 per year, the promise of more than 500 new jobs that paid \$3,000 or more was a godsend. As the Los

Angeles Times reported that year, “Most Hormel workers own their homes and have cars, refrigerators, well-dressed, well-fed, well-educated children.” For decades, wages held firm at about 20 percent above the national average for a manufacturing job, regardless of what was happening in the larger economy.

Then, in 1985, Hormel demanded a 23 percent wage cut, pushing union members at the flagship plant in Austin, Minnesota, to strike. Thirteen bitter months later, workers returned to the line. Within two years, Hormel threatened to eliminate more than 40 percent of the Fremont plant’s workforce unless the local agreed to wage cuts of their own.

Meanwhile, between 1983 and 1993, revenues doubled on increased output. As wages declined, earnings rose 350 percent, and the stock price went from four dollars per

share to nearly twenty-four. But soon Hormel started looking for an even cheaper workforce, one that would be afraid to complain no matter how fast or dangerous the line became.

Vazquez doesn't remember much about his journey to the United States from Chichihualco, a village of 10,000 people in the mountains of southern Mexico. It was 1991, and he was sixteen. "My mom, she make some call and we go," he told me. They took a winding dirt road through the Sierra Madre del Sur down to Chilpancingo, where they caught a northbound bus to Mexico City. From the capital they took another bus—about thirty-six hours—to Ciudad Juárez. Once they were within sight of the U.S. border crossing, a coyote hustled everyone through a hole in the corrugated-steel fence and down an embankment into the concrete containment chute that channels the Rio Grande between Juárez and El Paso. At the shift change for the border guards, Vazquez, his mother, and several others were pulled across the river, one by one, on an inner tube held between two lengths of rope. Once on the El Paso side, they were told to go to a city park, where they were given false identification papers and bus tickets north.

As children, many of the residents of Chichihualco had worked as *braceros*, picking their way from the lettuce fields of California to the cherry orchards of Washington State. After suffering through the Mexican economy's multiple crises in the 1980s, some of these migrant workers began thinking of moving north of the border permanently. But full-time residents would need year-round employment, not seasonal jobs in the fields. Fortunately, the meat-processing plants of Kansas and eastern Nebraska were hiring.

It wasn't just Hormel attracting undocumented workers to Nebraska. Fremont Beef, a Cargill-owned plant in Schuyler, Tyson plants in Madison and Norfolk, and Wimmer's Meats in West Point all began employing large numbers of Hispanic

immigrants. Caravans of minibuses made the pilgrimage from Chichihualco to Chilpancingo every month, driving north from Mexico City through Monterrey to Piedras Negras, just across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas. "After a rest and once their supplies are set," *Business Mexico* magazine reported in 2003,

it's only a few hours through the desert mountains of southern Texas to the safe house—a motel where the groups split off either to Schuyler or Fremont in Nebraska or Liberal or Dodge City in Kansas.

In an interview with the *Herald Mexico* in 2005, Chichihualco's mayor estimated that hundreds of thousands of dollars were sent to his town from Nebraska and Kansas each month. With those funds, Vazquez told me, the highway into town had been paved, the narrow main thoroughfare had been widened into a tree-lined avenue, and stuccoed brick-and-mortar homes had been built among the old adobe huts.

For Vazquez, the work at Hormel was supposed to be temporary, just enough for him to get on his feet and start a business in Fremont. He spent a year or so on the kill floor, hitting hogs with a prod to stun them for slaughter, before he was finally promoted to "sticking"—plunging a steel blade into each pig's jugular to drain it of blood. He put away enough money to qualify for a home loan, and he took in renters to help cover his mortgage payments. He had plans to start a restaurant, a bakery, maybe even a small grocery store.

But then Bob Warner, a member of Fremont's city council, proposed the idea of an anti-immigration ordinance, one that would outlaw the harboring, hiring, and transporting of illegal immigrants. Warner was unapologetic about his goal of forcing undocumented workers out of town. "When they find out that Fremont is not a haven for illegal immigration," he said at the meeting, "they will leave." (In a 2012 Republican primary debate, Mitt Romney envisioned something similar nationwide: "The answer is self-deportation," he said, "which is people decide they can do better by going home.")

Though Vazquez and his family were U.S. citizens (he and Miguela applied as minors and were processed quickly; the couple's five children were born here), their renters were not. When word of the proposed ordinance spread among the workers at Hormel, Vazquez's tenants, already two months behind on their rent, left without warning—or payment. He searched frantically for new renters, but it seemed everyone was fleeing. Vazquez defaulted on his loan, and he and his family left town, too.

Bob Warner is in his eighties, but he retains the booming voice that served him well on the Fremont city council for twenty years. During that time, Warner told me, he had felt powerless against the demographic shift his town was experiencing. He watched Mayor Skip Edwards kowtow to Hormel from the moment he took office in 1988, even as the company steadily increased its Hispanic workforce. Warner was convinced that most of the new workers were in the United States illegally—an assertion he supported by pointing to the number of Spanish-speaking adults in Fremont. "How could a person be a twenty-one-year-old adult and have no knowledge of the English language at all?" he asked me. "That's all bullshit."

At the city-council meeting in which Warner proposed his ordinance, city attorney Dean Skokan agreed to work on the legislation but warned the council that similar laws were facing stiff—and expensive—constitutional challenges. The ACLU had elsewhere argued that such ordinances were preempted by federal immigration law, that they lacked sufficient safeguards to protect constitutional property rights, and that they violated the Fair Housing Act. "I'm not telling you this can't be done," Skokan said. "I'm telling you it's going to be very difficult."

Skokan had a draft ready for its first public reading on the evening of July 8. Just before four o'clock that day, Warner said, he was tipped off that the entire second shift at Hormel had called in sick; employees were carpooling to the Fremont Municipal Building. By the time Warner



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reached the council chambers, the room was nearly filled with Hormel workers—and the police had been dispatched to maintain order.

The city clerk read aloud from the bill, which had been modeled on similar measures provided by the Immigration Reform Law Institute (IRLI), where Kris Kobach was legal counsel. The members of the city council announced that they would hear constituents' comments at this meeting and two more to come before making a decision. They heard first from several landlords, who said that because as many as a third of all renters in Fremont were Hispanic, it would be impractical to check everyone's status, and that trying would lead to the targeting of Hispanics.

Warner responded angrily. "Illegal is illegal," he said, "and it has nothing to do with discrimination." Several ordinance supporters in the crowd began pointing around the room: "There's an illegal ... There's an illegal ... There's an illegal ..." The atmosphere was so tense that when a group of Hispanics started for the door during a recess, a police officer insisted on escorting them to their cars for their protection. Before the meeting was adjourned, Warner and Skokan scheduled a second reading of the ordinance for July 29.

In the three intervening weeks, things got worse. Hispanic residents received threatening letters, were harassed while shopping, and were shouted at from passing cars. One morning, a man named Alfredo Velez arrived at his grocery store, Tienda Mexicana Guerrero, to find his front window shot out.

In preparation for the next meeting, Skokan took a draft of the bill directly to Kris Kobach. With Kobach's help in reshaping the language to resemble that of the most successful ordinances—the ones still working their way through the courts in Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Texas—Skokan tried to come up with a proposal that would be deemed constitutional should the ordinance pass a council vote. After Kobach got involved, councilman Charlie Jansen, who later announced a bid for

the state legislature on an anti-immigration platform, told the *Fremont Tribune*, "The thing that frustrates me the most as an American citizen is that we have a federal law that we're unable to enforce locally."

The July 29 hearing drew more than a thousand people—so many that the gathering was moved to the auditorium of the local high school. Some fifty police officers and a bomb-sniffing dog patrolled the crowd, and more than seventy people were permitted to take the lectern. Jerry Hart, a retired IRS auditor from Fremont, said he was outraged that the ordinance hadn't already been implemented. John Wiegert, a fifth-grade teacher in nearby Yutan, told the council that illegal immigrants were a strain on the area's schools and hospitals. "Racism has nothing to do with this ordinance," Wiegert insisted. "This ordinance is about what is legal and what is illegal. If the federal government is not going to watch out for us, then we need to watch out for ourselves."

After more than three and a half hours of testimony, the members of the council decided to cancel the third hearing and vote on the ordinance that night. They explained later that they worried about further unrest if they waited another three weeks. When the measure came to a vote, just before midnight, the council split—four to four—leaving Mayor Edwards to break the tie.

Edwards had foreseen this possibility; he took out a prepared statement. "This has weighed very heavy on me," he said, and even though he was allowed to abstain, he had decided to vote. "Control of illegal immigration is a federal issue," he said, and the proposed ordinance overstepped the city's jurisdiction. He said he had consulted with Nebraska attorney general Jon Bruning, who agreed that immigration matters should remain in federal hands. Passing an ordinance might pull Fremont, already struggling economically, into a long and expensive legal fight it would ultimately lose.

"I vote no," Edwards concluded—and the room roared, but not everyone was cheering.

The next day, John Wiegert got a phone call from Wanda Kotas, then

the manager of the Fremont Veterans Club. Wiegert and Kotas had both spoken passionately in favor of the ordinance the night before, and both were furious that Mayor Edwards had cast the deciding vote with a prepared statement—evidence, as they saw it, that the outcome had been determined ahead of time, that the whole process of gathering the town had been a sham.

Kotas told Wiegert that she had been contacted by John Copenhaver, an anti-immigration activist in Omaha who had called the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, which was defeated by Republicans in the House of Representatives, a “blueprint for the destruction of America.” Copenhaver had told Kotas that she should draft a petition to put the ordinance to a public vote. She would need two other Fremont citizens to act as sponsors, and they would need to collect 3,300 signatures. Kotas wanted to know if Wiegert would sign on as the second petitioner; he agreed and suggested that Kotas ask Jerry Hart to be the third.

They divided the city into a grid and went door-to-door collecting signatures. They got phone lists from Charlie Janssen, whose campaign for the state legislature was already under way. When Wiegert’s Christmas break came around at school, he started making phone calls full-time. Bob Warner helped support the petition, too: he called his constituents during the day and went out to meet with them at night.

Hart sent a letter to the editor of the *Fremont Tribune*:

The more that I look around Fremont, read the paper, talk to people, the more that I am sickened by what is happening to this town. It disgusts and angers me that this city is being destroyed by the greed of Hormel, Fremont Beef and like minded places.

A little more than two weeks later, on February 23, 2009, Hart, Kotas, and Wiegert submitted their petition with more than 4,100 signatures.

After they received the petition, the city council voted unanimously to request a ruling from the district court of Dodge County on whether

the proposed ordinance was constitutional. The three petitioners met Kris Kobach for lunch in Fremont, and he offered to work with them on the ballot initiative pro bono—on the condition that they fully commit to the case, with the knowledge that it might be a protracted fight.

Kobach described the meeting to me as “a refreshing vignette—no, let me use the English word—a refreshing *little picture* of citizens who were taking this issue on, who were trying to get expert help, and who were just delighted that I was willing to help them.”

For the next year, challenges to the proposed ballot measure made their way through the Dodge County district court and the Nebraska Supreme Court. At the same time, Kobach was advising State Senator Janssen on LB 1001, a bill to repeal Nebraska’s Dream Act, which made in-state tuition available to undocumented immigrants who graduated from high school in the state. (Kobach also personally filed suit against the University of Nebraska, the State College System, and Nebraska Community Colleges on behalf of six legal residents—his in-laws and a few friends in Fairbury—claiming that their taxes were being used to support tuition breaks for illegal aliens in violation of federal law.)

In 2010, Kobach captured the Republican nomination for Kansas secretary of state—an office he eventually won in a landslide. He conceded that the laws he was helping to write were part of a concerted effort at “attrition through enforcement”—self-deportation. But he took offense at the suggestion that the intended effect amounted to harassment. “That’s not it at all. It’s just changing the calculation,” Kobach insisted. “If before Fremont adopted the ordinance you had an eighty percent chance of finding a job and successfully getting that job illegally, now maybe it’s a thirty percent chance. So it changes the calculation of a rational decision maker. Maybe a person says, ‘I’m not going to go to Fremont. I might not even go to the United States.’ So it’s all about changing the calculation: you ratchet up the costs, and you ratchet

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down the benefits, so that people make the rational decision to follow the law.”

Michael Hethmon, IRLI's senior counsel, has called these local ordinances and state bills “field tests.” Kobach and IRLI are pursuing a kind of spinning-plate strategy—keeping several cases going at once and trying slightly different approaches with each one. The ultimate goal is to bring each case to the United States Supreme Court and, bit by bit, cobble together a new, wide-ranging immigration policy.

The Fremont ordinance was still in the courts when, shortly after the start of the morning shift on March 8, 2010, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents entered the Fremont Beef processing plant. The company was one of a thousand businesses nationwide selected at random and audited against the Federal Trade Commission's identity-theft database. Agents presented the company with a list of names, and those employees were summoned to a conference room. Managers did not tell the workers why they had been called in, only that they should cooperate and answer all questions. In the hallway outside the conference room, ICE agents—dressed in civilian clothing, their firearms concealed—divvied up case files. Then they went in and began calling names.

One agent sat down behind the conference table and called the name of Olga Arguelles. A woman rose and came to sit beside him. He showed his identification and asked for her true and complete name, which she gave him. She told him that she had been born in Guatemala, that she was thirty-two years old, and that she had been living in a trailer park in Schuyler. She admitted that she lacked immigration papers and had entered the country illegally. The agent informed her that she was being taken into custody on an administrative arrest, then escorted her across the hall to a temporary holding room. ICE eventually arrested seventeen workers from Fremont Beef's dayside crew.

To Jerry Hart, the sweep confirmed what he and his fellow petitioners had been saying all along. “To those people who want proof that Fremont has a problem with illegal aliens,” he wrote in another letter to the editor of the *Fremont Tribune*,

here it is. To those that still think that the problem is not that big, think again... Had the ordinance prohibiting the hiring, renting to or harboring of illegal aliens been in force, these identity thefts might not have happened. It is appalling that citizens have to fight the City of Fremont, have to take the time and effort to circulate petitions to force this city to enforce federal laws.

An email circulated among Hormel's workers that claimed federal agents were planning a raid at their plant next and warning that immigrants should stay away from Walmart because ICE agents might be positioned there as well. The sheriff's office was called out to the plant to investigate a suspicious-looking device in an employee locker. Federal officials sent in a robot to retrieve it and destroy it in the parking lot. Afterward, everyone returned to work.

Then, on April 23, 2010, a ruling came down from the Nebraska Supreme Court: the ordinance language was deemed constitutional. A public vote on the measure was set for June 21.

After the April 23 ruling, enough immigrants—legal or not—left Fremont that Hormel decided it was time to act, albeit covertly. The company formed an alliance with the Fremont Chamber of Commerce and a group called One Fremont One Future, founded by Kristin Ostrom, a Fremont resident who had previously served as the executive director of the Nebraska Justice Center. By the time the coalition held its first meetings, only a month remained until the vote.

Volunteers went door-to-door in town, registering voters. They also worked to dispel rumors that there would be immigration officials and police checking I.D. outside polling places. There were numerous reports of spontaneous intimidation similar

to what had occurred before the first vote on the ordinance—people shouting “Go back to Mexico!” from passing vehicles—and of windows being shot out. Someone vandalized a Habitat for Humanity sign so that it read HABITAT FOR MEXICANS. A rock was thrown through the front window of Ostrom's house.

One Fremont One Future didn't initially have the budget for yard signs or bumper stickers or buttons. But then Ron Tillery, executive director of the Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce, contacted Les Leech, president of Fremont Beef, and Donnie Temperley, the plant manager at Hormel. Leech went to Hormel's corporate headquarters in Austin, Minnesota, to discuss strategy, and Temperley asked Hormel for funds to help produce an anti-ordinance TV-advertising campaign.

Shortly before Tillery and Ostrom were scheduled to give interviews on KHUB radio in Fremont, a Hormel PR manager named Bill McLain sent them a long email. “I've drafted a list of questions that I think could be topics of discussion during the show tomorrow,” he wrote. “I will start drafting proposed responses to these questions and send them to you.” Later that night, McLain sent detailed answers—more than 2,200 words in all—to each of the questions he had posed.

When I contacted Hormel about their involvement with Ostrom's campaign, the company released a prepared statement: “Hormel Foods supported the Chamber's position in opposition to the ordinance,” they wrote, but had “found it most appropriate to communicate through the Chamber to enable a constructive dialogue and to speak on behalf of all its members about this issue.”

On the weekend before the vote, Ostrom and other opponents of the measure organized a final push—200 volunteers canvassing 9,000 homes. At the Regency II trailer park, where many of the plants' Hispanic workers lived, there was a simple white sign at the entrance: VOTE NO.

On the night of June 21, 2010, the supporters of One Fremont One Future gathered in the old Fremont Veterans Club off Military Avenue—

the very spot where the first signatures for the petition had been collected—and waited for the results. It wasn't close. The county clerk's office reported that night that Fremont voters had approved the measure by a wide margin—57 percent to 43 percent. "There were a lot of tears in this room tonight," Ostrom told the *New York Times*. "Unfortunately, people have voted for an ordinance that's going to cost millions of dollars, and that says to the Hispanic community that the Anglo community is saying they are not welcome here."

The ACLU, together with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, decided to file suit against the City of Fremont in federal court, and they hired Ostrom to work on immigration issues full-time. Ostrom hoped the courts would strike down the ordinance, just as they had previous measures in other small towns, and that this would end the long battle in Nebraska.

A few months after the suit was filed, in January 2011, Charlie Janssen introduced a Kobach-approved anti-immigration law, LB48, at the state level. When the bill was debated, some legislators objected to language in it that gave to any peace officer the power to determine the immigration status of a person "when reasonable suspicion exists that the person is unlawfully present in the United States." State Senator Steve Lathrop, whose district is in Omaha, asked Janssen, "Can you think of anything besides skin color and a command of the English language that would provide a reasonable suspicion?" Janssen struggled to answer:

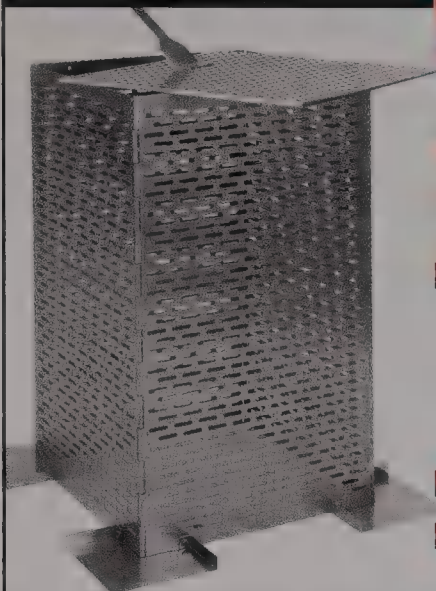
If you ... You know, one scenario would be perhaps if you pulled somebody over in an unlicensed vehicle. Nobody knew exactly where they were going. There were way too many people in the vehicle as far as ...

The gallery in the capitol building let out a collective gasp; a disgruntled murmur passed up and down the rows of senators. But Janssen proceeded: "There are ten people in a vehicle; that could be"—and here Janssen was interrupted by the sergeant at arms calling for order—

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"reasonable suspicion." The exchange sank LB48, and Ostrom hoped it would take the Fremont ordinance with it.

But then, in February 2012, U.S. district court judge Laurie Smith Camp issued a declaratory judgment on the Fremont ordinance. She struck down some of the housing provisions; the town, she found, could not revoke occupancy licenses from or impose fines on landlords who rented to undocumented aliens. But she criticized the ACLU and the other plaintiffs for alleging racial bias without sufficient evidence and upheld a provision requiring businesses in Fremont to use E-Verify, a federal system that checks prospective employees for valid citizenship.

Both sides claimed victory, but the E-Verify provision makes it very difficult for undocumented immigrants to live in Fremont: they will either have to enter a false name on employment-application forms—an act that would likely violate state laws concerning document fraud—or willingly acknowledge their illegal status.

After the district-court ruling, Kristin Ostrom and her husband decided it was time to leave Fremont. The couple who bought the Ostroms' house, Rafael Del Jesus and April Wadleigh, got their keys the day the new ordinance went on the books. When I met them later that day, their two children, Eleyanna and Audrek, were bellowing through the empty house, charging up and down the stairs, as Wadleigh and Del Jesus stood outside—still marveling that this beautiful Victorian, with its wraparound porch looking out onto the boulevard, was really theirs.

The family had lived at the Conestoga Crossing Apartments for two years, then spent the following six in a snug duplex near the YMCA. All the while, Del Jesus has worked at Hormel; he started out driving animals through the chutes to the kill floor and eventually worked his way up to running the spice mixer, a computerized system that chills and blends 9,000 pounds of sausage at a time. He told me that he had supported the ordinance when it was first introduced and only slowly came to oppose it.

Del Jesus is disarmingly baby faced, with Cabbage Patch cheeks and sad eyes. As we spoke in the kitchen of his new home, empty except for the two bar stools the Ostroms had left at the island, he paced back and forth, searching for the words to explain why he had been in favor of the ordinance. When he was eleven years old, he told me, he came to the United States with his brother from the Dominican Republic. The boys had been separated from their mother for seven years while she worked to save up money and navigate the bureaucracy of the immigration system to bring them to be with her in Brooklyn. He could barely remember her; his grandmother was the only mother he knew. "Being honest with you," he said, "I did not want to come here."

His eyes turned to the ceiling and then to the kitchen window. He broke into a quiet sob. "Let me tell it," Wadleigh said gently, and Del Jesus went outside. She explained that her husband had never been able to get over the double loss—first of his real mother when he was four, and then of his grandmother when he was eleven. He couldn't help but think that his wait to move to the United States might not have been so long, so painful, had there not been so many illegal immigrants flooding into the country ahead of him. When the ordinance was proposed, Del Jesus later told me, he had thought: "Good, they should have to play by the same rules as me."

But then Del Jesus started to notice a change in Fremont. After a night of drinking and dancing, a friend of his from work was stopped by a sheriff's deputy; the friend failed a field sobriety test and was put on probation for DUI. (That same friend's Habitat for Humanity home was later one of those vandalized before the 2010 immigration vote.) Cruisers were stationed at the western edge of town, pulling over cars as they came from the Mexican dance hall—never outside the bars frequented by white Fremonters.

Del Jesus was also affected directly. When he and Wadleigh applied for a home loan, they were initially denied because they didn't have any

credit history. To build credit fast, Del Jesus bought a BMW sedan—but driving around Fremont in 2011, he was repeatedly stopped by police asking to see proof of ownership. The third time he was stopped, Del Jesus began “yelling and swearing at the officer,” according to Fremont’s deputy police chief, and was arrested for disorderly conduct.

Del Jesus had been depressed for a while after that, but in the weeks after taking possession of the house, he was back to his old self. For Easter Sunday, he invited a friend from work to come over with his family for an egg hunt in the grass. Wadleigh conceded that she wondered what the neighbors had thought, watching a group of Hispanics out in the yard, playing with their children and grilling, but then she realized:

“This was exactly what Kristin was fighting for.”

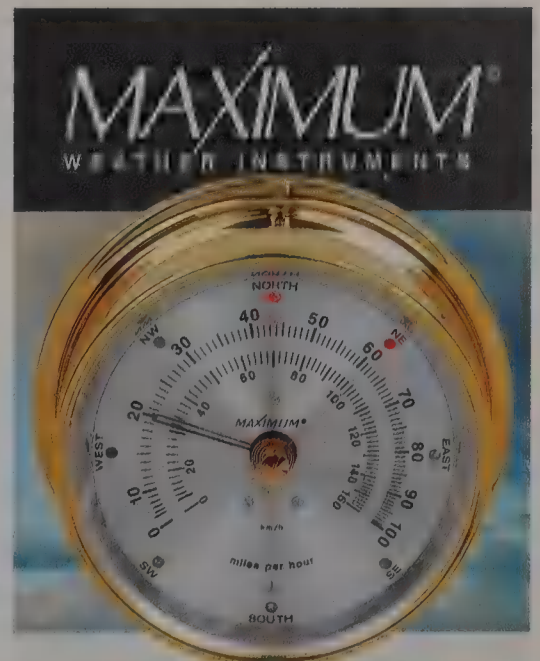
Last June, the Supreme Court overturned significant portions of Arizona’s anti-immigration law, but affirmed the right of state law-enforcement officials to ask for proof of citizenship during routine stops. Kris Kobach called the ruling a victory, adding, “It makes the City of Fremont’s case even stronger.” In reality, it was the beginning of the G.O.P.’s slow move away from immigration hard-liners like Kobach—though not in time to save the 2012 election. (After saying “Kris has been a true leader on securing our borders” in January 2012 and naming him as an “informal adviser” on immigration in April, Mitt Romney claimed in September not to know who Kobach was.) But the anti-immigration wing of the Republican Party hasn’t disappeared. With victories like the one in Fremont, it will continue to press its advantage locally as the rest of the party shifts to embrace immigration reform nationally. (Last August, for example, Nebraska governor Dave Heineman announced that his state would not issue driver’s licenses to immigrants given the right to stay in the United States under President Obama’s “deferred action” program.) If the Supreme Court allows greater control by local governments over immigra-

tion law, a federal Dream Act and other reforms will do very little to make life in this country as an undocumented immigrant—or as a Spanish-speaking American citizen—tolerable.

The uncertainty is enough to keep Raul Vazquez worried. He still gets up at 4:30 A.M. to get ready for another day’s shift at Hormel. He puts on the coffee and gets dressed—always in a sweater to keep off the chill of the refrigerated ham department. He fills his thermos and then sets out, picking up a friend who works on the kill floor along the way. The streets in town are still dark—but they are anything but abandoned. Headlights hunt down the side streets and out onto Colfax; they crawl across the overpass—the grain elevators and the city water tower floodlit from below—and then jog east onto 16th Street. Most mornings, when Vazquez reaches U.S. 30, the clock on his dashboard reads just 4:50 A.M., but already a line of cars stretches out before him, snaking toward Fremont. ■

February Index Sources

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BLIND A

The European Union rules again

In 2006, London's Haunch of Venison gallery purchased several works of art from the United States—six video installations by Bill Viola and a fluorescent-light sculpture by Dan Flavin. After the works arrived in the United Kingdom, the gallery was surprised to receive a bill from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for £36,000 in unpaid duty. The tax man's argument? Flavin's and Viola's works were not art. Because the sculptures had been taken apart before they were brought into Britain, they were, instead, the sum of their parts, which would be taxed individually.

Every year, some £4 billion worth of fine art is shipped in and out of the United Kingdom. Imported artworks usually fall under Chapter 97 of the tariff code (paintings, print, sculpture), which classifies them as zero-rated—collectors and galleries pay no import duty—and subject to a reduced value-added tax of 5 percent. Haunch of Venison called each of Viola's video installations a single sculpture; HMRC said the disassembled pieces were "image projectors" under tariff code 9008 30 00. Flavin's untitled piece, which the gallery called "Six Alternating Cool White/Warm White Fluorescent Lights, Vertical and Centred," meanwhile, was actually a chandelier—"electrical ceiling or wall lighting fittings"—under code 9405 10 28. The gallery was told to pay duty ranging, depending on the classification of the component, from 3.7 to 4.7 percent as well as the full weight of the VAT, which was then 17.5 percent. Presented with the bill, Haunch of Venison hired Pierre Valentin, a lawyer with experience in the art world. "My first reaction was, Of course they can win this," he said. "To call them a bunch of electrical items just because customs sees them in boxes is utter nonsense."

C00266

CUSTOMS DUTY – classification – works of art – sculpture? – yes – correctly declared as such? – yes – appeals allowed.

LONDON TRIBUNAL CENTRE

HAUNCH OF VENISON
PARTNERS LIMITED

Appellant

-and-

HER MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS OF
REVENUE AND CUSTOMS

Respondents

Tribunal: Richard Barlow (Chairman)
Mrs Lynne H Salisbury (Member)

Sitting in public in London on 8 – 11 September 2008 (corrected transcripts received 2 October 2008).

Conrad McDonnell of counsel instructed by Messrs Withers for the Appellant

Andrew O'Connor of counsel, instructed by the Solicitor for HM Revenue and Customs for the Respondents

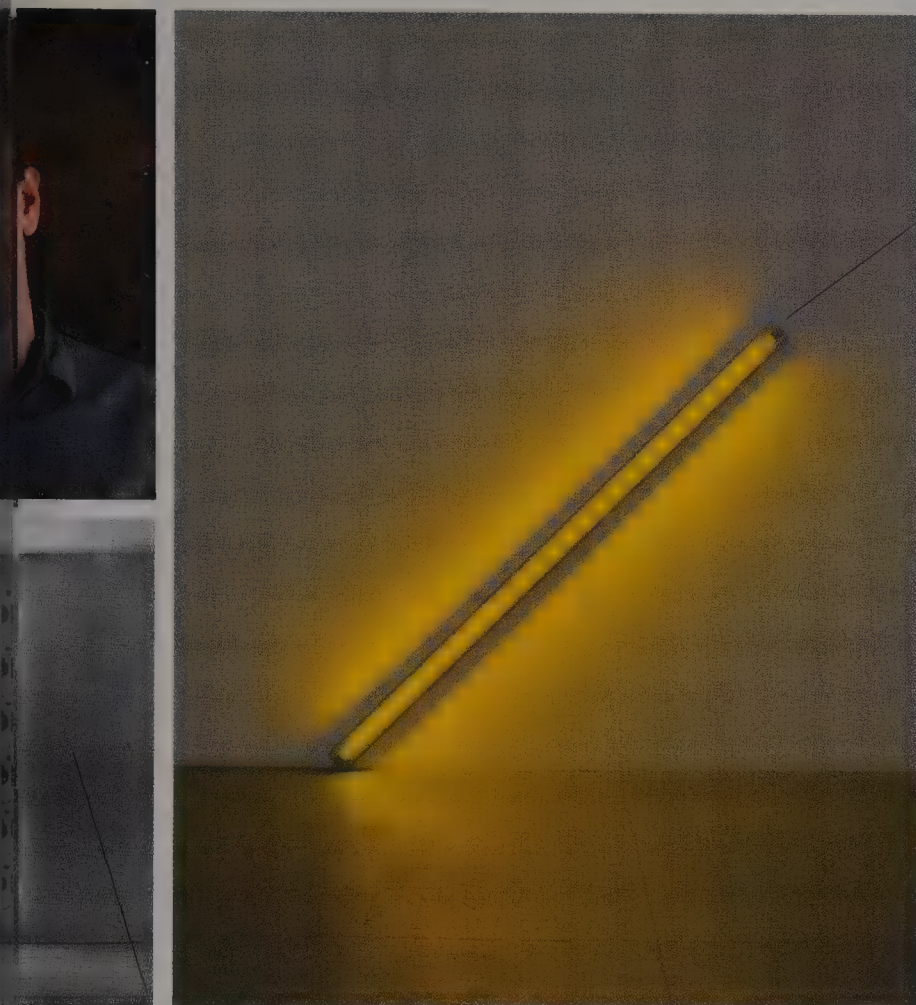
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The gallery and HMRC met at a tribunal in London in September 2008. According to the lawyers for HMRC, the sculptures "are not works of art when they are dismantled for transport and only become works of art again when they are put together for display." Among the witnesses who came to testify on behalf of Haunch of Venison were Martin Caiger-Smith of the Courtauld Institute of Art, Sandy Nairne of the National Portrait Gallery, and art critic Robert Cumming; the lawyers for customs called no one, preferring to argue the utilitarian nature of the materials involved rather than engage in a broader philosophical discussion. The verdict was scathing: "We regard it as absurd to classify any of these works as components ignoring the fact that the components together make a work of art," said the tribunal's chairman. He also criticized the main premise of the customs lawyers' argument, which was that too lax an interpretation of Chapter 97 would mean anyone could import anything into the United Kingdom and call it art: "If someone declares something under Chapter 97 which is not obviously an art work, then he can be challenged to prove that it is and will of course fail."

Center, top: Still from *Man of Sorrows*, 2001, color video, by Bill Viola. Photo by Kira Perov © Bill Viola Studio. Center, bottom: *untitled*, 1973, cool-white and warm-white fluorescent light, by Dan Flavin © 2013 Stephen Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York City; courtesy David Zwirner, New York City/London. Right: *the diagonal of May 25, 1963* (to Constantin Brancusi), 1963, yellow fluorescent light, by Dan Flavin. Photo by Billy Jim, New York City © 2012 Stephen Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York City; courtesy David Zwirner, New York City/London

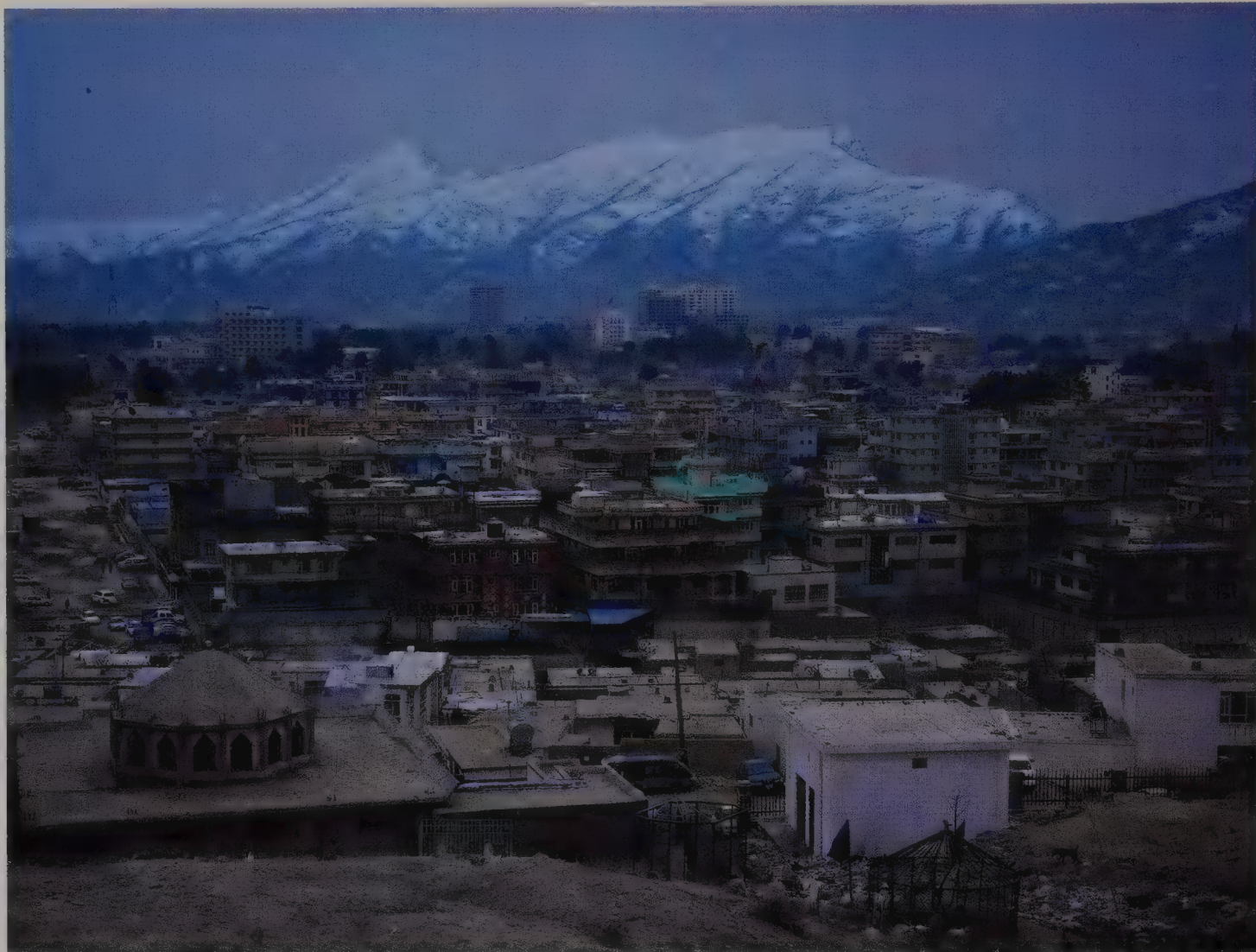
PRAISAL

Contemporary art, by Kabir Chibber



The affair reminded many people of the 1928 decision by U.S. Customs to classify Constantin Brancusi's abstract bronze *Bird in Space* as a kitchen utensil. (Flavin's first-ever fluorescent-light sculpture, from 1963, was dedicated to Brancusi.) "I was sick to receive the news that a bastard in New York made you pay duty on your sculpture," Ezra Pound wrote to Brancusi. "I could spit in the eye of the skinflint in charge of these matters." Brancusi fought back, and in *Brancusi v. United States*, two now obscure sculptors, Robert Ingersoll Aitken and Thomas Jones, were called by the government to testify that the bird was not art. Marcel Duchamp and others rushed to defend Brancusi, who eventually won his case, but one wonders how they would have fared against the might of the Eurocracy. Perhaps lovers of Viola and Flavin can take heart from what Brancusi's lawyer Charles J. Lane wrote to him after they won the case: "The volume containing reports of the decision will contain a picture of your work, which is an honor rarely, if ever, extended by any Court to an artist." Lane might be surprised to learn that such honors are still being bestowed today. ■

Alas, enter the Eurocrats. In 2009, HMRC appealed the tribunal's decision to the European Commission. "Once it got to Brussels, it was put into the sausage machine without any input from collectors or people from the art world," said Mark Stephens of London's Contemporary Art Society. In an email to Lesley Holiday of HMRC, Hana Prochazkova of the EC's Taxation and Customs Union struggled to understand what exactly she was looking at. "I see something like a lightning tube attached to a rounded piece of plastics but what is it for example in the middle???" In August 2010, the EC decided that the disassembled Viola and Flavin sculptures were not works of art in any of the twenty-seven countries in the European Union. "It is a question of consistency," said a commission spokeswoman. "The customs committee looks at the nature of the goods and not at their use." Lawyers for the EC have argued that their finding applies only to this one case. But Bill Viola told me he was worried: "This ruling could be taken to extremes, since one can also argue that the components of a painting, such as a canvas, is not a work of art—or a metal pipe, for example, used in sculpture. It is outrageous." David Zwirner, whose gallery represents the Flavin estate, announced that he would appeal, but for now the EC's assessment stands. "The ruling is obviously ridiculous," said Zwirner gallery managing director Tracy Nolder, "but challenging it isn't something one can do alone." Haunch of Venison, now owned by Christie's, wants nothing to do with the matter.



Top: The districts of Wazir Akbar Khan and Sherpur, in Kabul, which occupy the site of a fortress built by the British in the Second Anglo-Afghan War © Simon Norfolk/INSTITUTE. Bottom: "Cabul. West End Sherpur. Winter," by John Burke, 1878–1880, courtesy the Wilson Centre for Photography, London. Both images appear in *Burke + Norfolk: Photographs from the War in Afghanistan*, published in 2011 by Dewi Lewis Publishing.

KABUBBLE

Counting down to economic collapse in the Afghan capital

By Matthieu Aikins

It was a Monday in November, the second day of Eid al-Adha 2011, and the streets of Kabul were free of their usual knot of honking vehicles. In Taimani, a residential district of tree-lined avenues and walled courtyards in the center of town, groups of young boys ran down the road in sandals, calling happily to one another. Older men in pale, starched robes stood in pairs, murmuring salutations as friends passed by. A boy on a bicycle carried a stack of flatbread wrapped in a black-and-white scarf; the aroma of the baker's oven lingered in the air after he rode by.

"This area is interesting because it was never poor," Jolyon Leslie said to me as we left one of Taimani's main roads and headed toward a hill called Kolola Pushta. Leslie, a slight, ruddy-cheeked South African architect with a widow's peak of closely trimmed white hair, first came to Afghanistan in 1989 with the United Nations; he has been working here ever since. "I'm absolutely staggered how things have changed," he said, gesturing at the half-built homes around us. "Almost every compound is having, or has had, construction done."

Matthieu Aikins is a freelance writer based in Afghanistan. His article "Disappearing Ink" appeared in the January 2011 issue of Harper's Magazine.

Climbing the dirt road up Kolola Pushta, we looked out at the capital, a dusty lattice of densely packed flat-roofed



houses interspersed with pine trees and high-rise buildings. Kabul is enclosed by the lower ridges of the Hindu Kush mountain range; most of the city lies at nearly 6,000 feet. The weather had been cool and clear recently, but now the usual mixture of dust and smog was settling over the city, drawing a brown film across the distant, snowy peaks of the Safi Mountains.

Across from us was a hill of similar height crowned with a large mud-brick fort built by the British in the 1840s,

during the First Anglo-Afghan War. Below the fort, on the steepest part of the hill, there was a cluster of traditional single-story houses. "This could be a photograph from the 1920s if you just look at the lower frame of it," said Leslie. He pointed toward the glass-faced office buildings behind the hill. "Then behind you've got the benefits of what is actually, to give credit to the engagement in Afghanistan, a degree of prosperity."

Since 2001, Kabul has been transformed from a ghost town ruined by civil war into a busy metropolis. While there hasn't been a proper census since 1979, the city's population is estimated to have grown from about 2 million to more than 4 million in the past ten years. Refugees returned from abroad and rural migrants fled violence in the countryside, cramming the narrow river valley, all seeking a share of the development and military funds being spent disproportionately in the capital. While rural Afghanistan still suffers from appalling levels of poverty (nearly one third of the children in the south of the country are acutely malnourished), the urban centers—not only Kabul but also Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif—have become boomtowns. Newcomers crowd into slum housing hoping to find a foothold

in the wartime economy. This influx has pushed up prices for labor, for consumer goods, and most of all for land. Houses in central Kabul sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars—in a country where per capita income averages \$528 a year.

I asked Leslie how the city looked different from when he arrived in 1989.

“What’s changed, spatially, is that people have gone up, because the land is so valuable,” he said. “And there’s no

cluster of bulbous wedding-cake houses. “Now the people who are powerful have to physically embody that power and wealth in glass and concrete.”

Squatting and land-grabbing are not the only ills of contemporary Kabul. Hundreds of thousands of cars and trucks inch along the city’s narrow streets each day, all burning leaded fuel. The smoke from burning scrap tires, wood, coal, and plastic garbage fills the air.

ernment doesn’t come close to having a balanced budget: during the 2010 fiscal year, public spending was \$9.4 billion, against just \$1.65 billion in revenues. Two thirds of the government’s payroll is covered by international donors. When the money stops—and so far the United States and the international community have made commitments only through 2015—a severe recession will almost certainly follow. Wealthy



planning control.” The slums have crept higher and higher on the ridges; the newest houses cling to the cliff-sides. Some 70 percent of the city’s population lives in unplanned and illegal construction. Many Kabul residents give protection payments to their community leaders, to the police, and to the city government to keep their homes from being torn down.

Leslie pointed out the areas seized by Kabul’s major power brokers after the fall of the Taliban, when U.S.-backed warlords and their militias came streaming into the city. Many of the developments in these areas had been sold and resold multiple times, making it difficult for the original owners to reclaim their property. “The biggest change, I think, is one of ostentation,” said Leslie, pointing at a

The city also faces a water crisis; the water table is both contaminated and dropping. Neighbors race against one another, boring deeper and deeper wells. The only place in the city with an underground sewer system is Micro-rayon, a neighborhood the Soviets built in the 1960s and ’70s. The rest sends its sewage into open gutters or poorly built septic tanks that further pollute the groundwater.

The aid boom of the past decade has fueled wild and haphazard growth without providing the infrastructure needed for it to last. In 2010, total aid spending was \$15.7 billion—equivalent in size to the entire Afghan GDP. A decade of easy money has made Afghanistan one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world. The Afghan gov-

Afghans will flee the country, and middle-class urbanites, who have made decent salaries working for NGOs and businesses tied to the aid community, will be stuck in a country with few economic prospects.* A recent World Bank report found that even in the most optimistic scenarios—if big mining projects come online and political stability is maintained—per capita GDP will decline and then flatline for a decade.

Leslie and I walked around to the north side of the hill. The sounds of

** Ryan Crocker, who until July 2012 served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, pointed out that aid had been so ineffective that ordinary Afghans were unlikely to notice its withdrawal. “You know, I’m not saying that’s a good thing, but it may significantly lessen the blow when we get to the end of 2014,” he told NPR in May.*

the city drifted up: the cries of roosters, the hum of distant cargo planes, the sharp reports of construction, the buzzing of military helicopters. Leslie and I looked out toward Taimani and Qala-e Fatullah. The two neighborhoods are popular with foreigners. In 2006, rioters filled their streets in response to a fatal collision between a U.S. military truck and several civilian cars, and mobs looted houses owned by expats. With the

Kabul with a proud grin. "Now I have a permanent address," he said as we entered the courtyard. He pointed out the double-paned windows; the large bedrooms for his parents, his siblings, his wife and child; the still uncarpeted basement where he planned to host family gatherings. Here was a space they could grow into. "When my brother gets married, he will build another story on top for his family," said Mohibzada.

ther was badly injured by a rocket. Mohibzada, as the eldest son, had to provide for his family, first in Peshawar, Pakistan, and then in the ruins of Taliban-ruled Kabul. When money was tight and they hadn't eaten in a while, Mohibzada's mother would go around in the evening in a burka and ask the neighbors for stale bread, which the family would soak in water and eat. "We thought that life would always be like that,



youth unemployment rate estimated to be 40 percent, an ever-worsening environmental crisis, and a housing bubble growing larger every day, it seemed likely that Kabul was bound for more unrest.

"What comes to mind is the night of the long knives, where Alexander Burnes was pulled from his house and had his throat slit," Leslie said, recalling an incident in 1841 when the population of Kabul rose up against the British occupiers. A single survivor escaped to India. "The first thing the Afghan elite are going to do is deflect disaffection toward foreigners. It's going to be very scary for a lot of people."

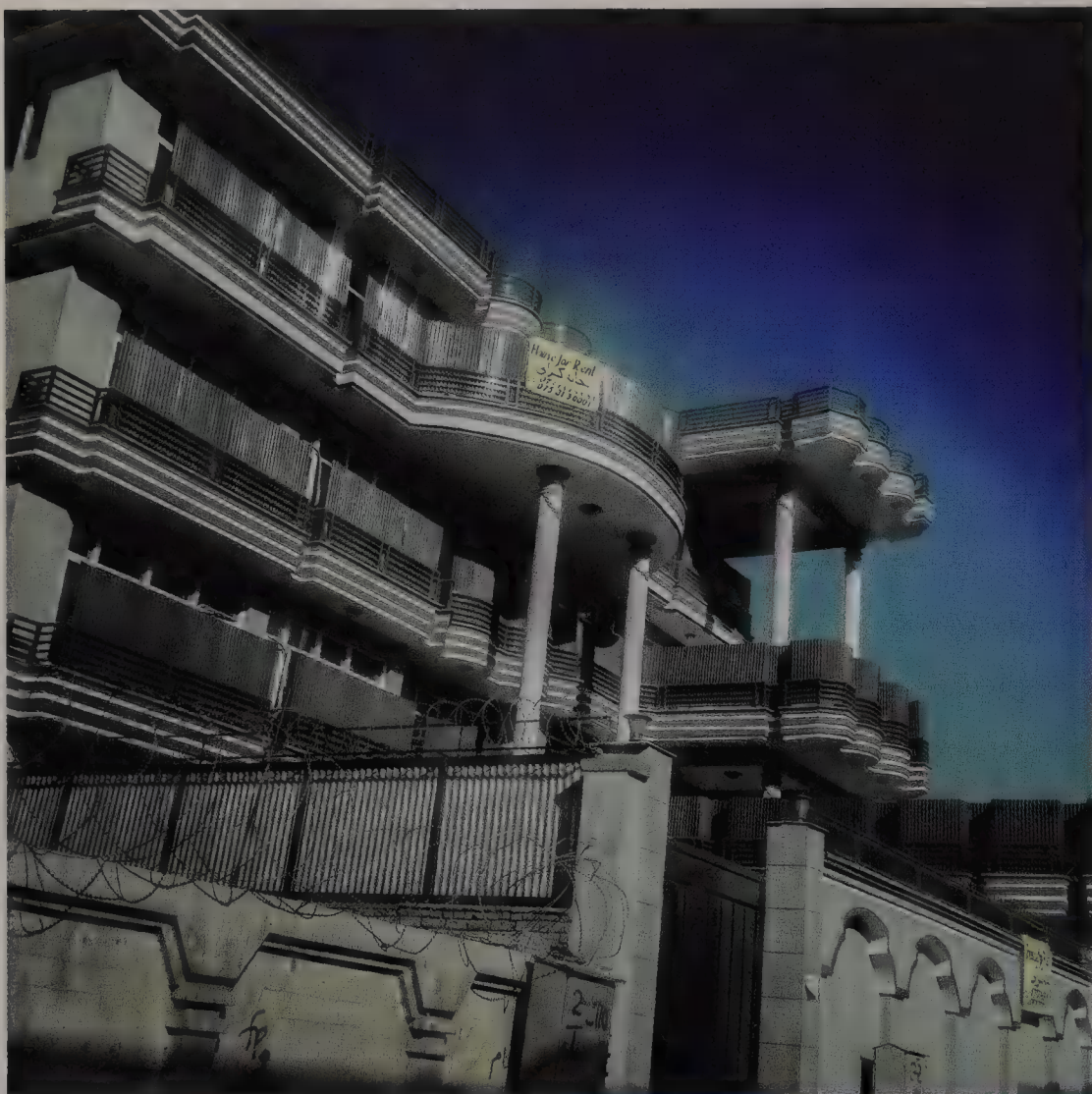
Rasool Mohibzada greeted me at the door of his house in southern

Mohibzada is thirty-one years old, with a reserve that might be mistaken for diffidence. He has a slender frame and is a careful dresser: when we first met in Kabul, he was coming from his job at the British Council—a government-funded cultural organization—wearing a modest but neatly tailored gray suit and a maroon tie. Today, he was wearing a gray shalwar kameez.

"It's a very big thing that you have your own house," Mohibzada said as we sat down in his living room. "You will have respect among people and your relatives." He and his family had moved in five days earlier, ending a nomadic period that had begun during the civil war. Twenty years ago, they fled Kabul for Pakistan after Mohibzada's fa-

ther was badly injured by a rocket. Mohibzada told me.

Through luck and effort—and the deus ex machina of international aid—Mohibzada had secured a well-paying job as a computer technician with the British Council and managed to climb into the middle class. With his monthly salary of \$1,400, and with \$25,000 in loans from friends and relatives, he was able to save up \$95,000 to buy the property and \$60,000 to build the house. Now he was worried about paying back his creditors. The British Council job might not last—Mohibzada and his co-workers had a bad scare in 2011 when the office was attacked and burned by a team of suicide bombers, though the program has continued in a different location.



The salaries of his mother and wife, both of whom earn \$120 per month as schoolteachers, were reminders of the economic realities in Afghanistan before the foreigners came.

Mohibzada, like most Afghans in Kabul, is well aware that America and its allies are growing weary of their long, expensive engagement. The grand plans made in 2001 for a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan have not come to fruition, and there is little hope that the United States and NATO can accomplish in the next few years what they have failed to do in the preceding decade. For Afghans like Mohibzada, 2014, the deadline for the transition to Afghan control of security, is a date to dread; the internationals, they fear, are all that shields them from the warlords and plutocrats, and from the poverty and daily violence suffered by their fellow Afghans in the countryside.

Mohibzada's four-year-old daughter ran into the living room and whispered that some guests had arrived. "Go on, child," he told her, smiling. "I'm coming."

He turned back to me. "Thirty years back, my parents hoped that one day the situation would get better. But it didn't." He shook his head, then glanced toward the door where his daughter had walked out. "I will always be dreaming that my child, Negah, will go to school, then go to college, then one day she will get her certificates and get a job and get married according to her own choice. But this is our dream—whether it's coming true or not, God knows it."

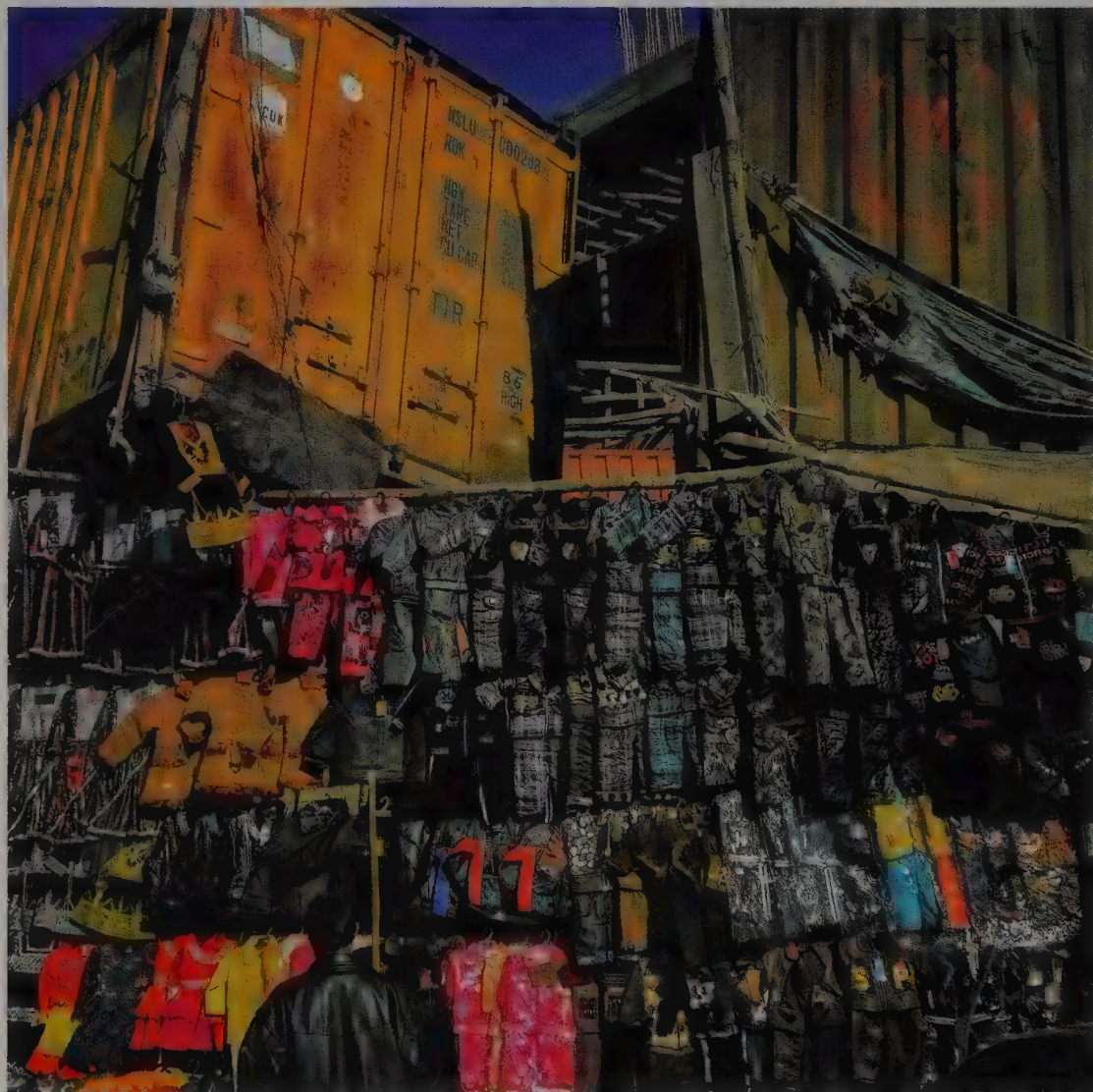
Above people like Mohibzada in Kabul's economic hierarchy is a small group of rich, foreign-educated Afghans paid internationally competitive salaries; above them, at the very top, are the businessmen, contractors, and warlords who have made millions off the torrent of money flowing into the country. They drive through the rutted streets in caravans of armored cars and build colossal, gaudy palaces. They've stashed most of their gains abroad: mind-boggling quantities of U.S. currency are exported from the country in hand-couriered packets

and on shrink-wrapped pallets. Afghanistan's central bank estimated that \$4.6 billion in cash left the country legally through Kabul International Airport in 2011 alone. There's no way of knowing exactly how much more has left the country by other means—Kabul's airport is the only place where it's counted—but the total must be in the tens of billions of dollars. Much of this money goes to Dubai, where wealthy Afghans have invested heavily in the real estate market, or to Malaysia, Pakistan, Switzerland.

The elites—and everyone else—do spend a lot of money in one area of the domestic economy: at Kabul's many lavish wedding halls. Recently I visited one known as the City Star, a vast complex that rises from the desert plain on the northern edge of the city. Guests there are greeted by a four-story-tall crescent moon surrounding an enormous star. When I arrived, I was led by armed, uniformed guards to a long room with high ceilings, lush carpets, and a wall of flatscreen TVs. I sat on an overstuffed leather couch, and an attendant brought me a cup of steaming green tea and bowls of raisins, almonds, and crisp Iranian pistachios crusted with flakes of salt.

The City Star's proprietor, Hajji Mowla Payman, was seated at one end of the room behind a massive carved wooden desk. He wore a black linen blazer over cream-colored robes and was deep in conversation with a white-bearded man in a skull-cap. A demure woman in a black head scarf stood on one side of the man, and his two middle-aged sons stood on the other. They were negotiating a wedding.

Weddings have always provided the family of the groom an opportunity to display its wealth. Since 2001, however, they've become caught up in the paroxysm of conspicuous consumption that has seized urban Afghans. The first wedding salons opened in the cities in the 1970s, but in the past decade they've mutated into something resembling amusement parks: cavernous halls marked by giant flashing billboards with names like Kabul Paris and Mumtaz Mahal—the ceremonial equivalent



of poppy palaces. As both expectations and costs have risen, even middle-class families now spend tens of thousands of dollars on weddings. In 2011, a law restricting wedding costs was proposed in the Afghan parliament, but it didn't pass. "It's a competition, and in Kabul it's gotten out of control," Fawzia Koofi, an Afghan lawmaker who helped draft the bill, told me. "Poorer families have to borrow the money or sell property."

Payman led me through them in sequence, uttering commands over a walkie-talkie to a control-room technician who would turn on the banks of chandeliers overhead. Each of the halls was divided by a screen into male and female sections, with tables and a stage for the band on the men's side. Most of the décor was flashy but cheap-looking, all mirrored-plastic inlays and polyester.

Payman and I descended the staircase to the main level slowly, like newlyweds. Near the bottom, he flipped a switch, and water began cascading underneath the stairs, illuminated by colored lights. "I designed all of this myself," he said.

Here the sons and daughters of government ministers and drug barons alike had been married. With the live bands, floral arrangements, videographers, wedding dresses, security



Clasping hands with the groom's father, Payman escorted him and his family to the door, then came over to greet me. During the Taliban period, Payman ran an import business in Kabul. After 2001, he switched to wedding halls. The City Star was his latest project, one of the largest such venues in Kabul. "People have come from thirty-three provinces to have weddings here," he said. "And every night there's been a wedding here, for the past two years."

We walked outside, passed an enormous stone fountain lit up in multiple colors, and entered the heart of the complex. The City Star is in fact composed of six wedding halls of increasing size and grandeur, from the Moon Saloon on up to the International Hall.

The International Hall occupied its own building separate from the other halls toward the back of the complex. Payman led me up a staircase to a small second-floor room where the bride and groom could prepare for their grand entrance. He opened a frosted-glass door, and we stepped out onto an elevated walkway. To our right stretched the 21,000-square-foot expanse of the hall. The walkway itself was done up in a sort of alpine motif, its concrete surface painted to resemble stone and dotted with fuzzy green artificial moss. To our left, below a mural of a sunny mountain scene, was a series of sculptures done in lumpy concrete, including a zaftig deer covered in heavy brown paint. The whole thing looked like a cross between the set of *Fraggle Rock* and a Rococo drawing room.

teams, and vehicle rentals, these top-tier ceremonies might cost the families arranging them \$100,000 or more.

Payman led me down into a basement kitchen, which was steamy with activity. The City Star's sixty-two food workers turned out thousands of dishes each evening. The complex has its own greenhouse for flowers, as well as several giant generators and wells that keep it supplied with electricity and water. It was strong evidence of the ingenuity of Afghan entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, little of the money spent here stays in the country for long. I asked Payman whether he bought anything locally. The flour for bread, the eggs?

Pakistan.

The ornate mirrors and chandeliers? Iran.

The tablecloths and carpets?
China.

The concrete and steel?

Pakistan.

"Nothing comes from this country!"
he said at last, his irritation evident.

"If I could build a factory,
I would."

Finding products made in
Afghanistan—even something as simple
as a traditional robe—is nearly

southeast Kabul. Eight years later,
the most notable occupant of the
park is a factory that prints leaflets
for NATO. There are also a couple
of smaller places churning out stuff
like toilet paper and cleaning prod-
ucts, but they are far outnumbered
by businesses that used up their ini-
tial grant money and folded, leaving
behind empty lots.

I met up with Amanullah Omidwar,
an Afghan entrepreneur, who offered

spending in Afghanistan is concen-
trated in the security sector: of the
nearly \$88.5 billion the United States
spent on "reconstruction" in Afghan-
istan between 2002 and 2012, almost
65 percent went to security and coun-
ternarcotics initiatives.

Despite the shift in their product
line, Rahmati's company had re-
mained faithful to its original man-
date of hiring Afghan women.
Omidwar and I walked up a flight of



impossible. In the narrow old streets
of Kabul's Mandawi bazaar, merchants
sit in front of one-room shops beside
piles of foreign-made goods. "I used to
import one container of wool a week
from Taiwan or Korea," a sixty-two-
year-old shopkeeper named Said
Qudus told me. "The factories in Ka-
bul and Istaliff would make socks,
scarves, and blankets." Now he sells
imported sewing supplies.

Afghanistan's economy has always
been largely agrarian, but by the
1980s there was a bustling industrial
sector along Jalalabad-Kabul Road,
on the eastern edge of the city. To-
day most of the factories there are
closed. In 2005, USAID spent
\$6.6 million to build the Juma Mo-
hammad Mohammadi Industrial
Park in Bagrami, a neighborhood in

to show me around a factory—one of
the largest in Kabul—owned by his
brother, Nusrullah Rahmati. Omidwar,
whose name means "hopeful" in Dari,
wore a pair of square, tinted glasses and
spoke in a cigarette-roughened voice.
His own factory, which had made army
belts, had recently shut down for lack
of international contracts.

We pulled up to a large three-story
building and entered the main hall-
way, where an array of photographs
showed Rahmati meeting foreign gen-
erals and diplomats. The company got
its start in 2002 producing upscale,
hand-embroidered women's clothing
for Western markets, but Rahmati
soon got a contract to produce bulk
orders of clothing for the Afghan mil-
itary and police, paid for by the U.S.
and NATO. Most of the development

stairs to the workshop, where dozens
of young women were working at
sewing machines with tan and olive-
drab cloth, the room humming with
the sound of the machines and
hushed conversation. "Women are
much better workers than men,"
Omidwar declared. "With them,
there's no problems with smoking
hash or taking breaks to talk on
their cell phones."

By the time I visited Rahmati's fac-
tory, the military and police clothing
contracts were already starting to dis-
appear. NATO had helped expand
the Afghan security forces from
120,000 soldiers, at the beginning of
2008, to 337,000 by October 2012.
That level cannot be sustained by the
Afghan government—the army and
police cost an estimated \$6 billion per

year, well in excess of the nation's entire budget—so it will be cut by a third after 2014. The private-security industry, which employs as many as 70,000 people, was another big source of revenue, although, again, most of the work was paid for by foreigners. When the money dries up, that will mean a lot of armed men out of jobs and out of uniform.

Omidwar took me to a second room, where a group of men was

ended. They filed out through the gates, pulling their head scarves tighter as they blended into the flow of minibuses, men pushing vegetable carts, and gawking boys on bicycles. "Do you ever have a problem with men harassing them?" I asked Omidwar. "We did," he said, "but then we had the police come down, and that stopped it."

As it got dark, Omidwar drove us back toward the center of Kabul. The

of the city: "One in Kot-e Sangi, one in Pul-e-Charkhi, and one in Darulaman. And the whole country will start making heroin. We'll be richer than America!" He laughed his raspy laugh.

The corrupting effect of international aid money has worked mostly from the top down: the ostentation of warlords and businessmen has inspired a generation of Afghan youth.



gathered around a drafting table. He handed me a simple blue nylon jacket that the company was planning to sell on the local market. "The problem is right now that the Chinese are selling it cheaper than us," he said. The high level of international spending in Kabul had driven up the costs of skilled labor, land, raw materials, and other inputs, and also held the afghani at an inflated exchange rate. Moreover, the free-trade, open-border policies pushed by the U.S. government and Afghan technocrats meant that neighboring countries could flood the market with cheap goods.

After Omidwar and I left the factory, we stood outside and watched as a line of women came out the main doors, laughing and talking. It was five o'clock, and their shift had

workers, he explained, came mostly from families that had moved to the capital from conservative, insecure rural areas in the south and southeast. I thought of Mohibzada's mother, the schoolteacher who had once walked to work with her hair in the wind, having to beg in her burka for stale bread. "What's going to happen to your factory when the foreigners leave?" I asked Omidwar.

"We're going to make those jackets. You saw them," he said.

"Do you really think you're going to be able to underprice the Chinese?" I asked. He sighed, looked out the window, and dragged on his cigarette. When he looked back at me there was a glint in his eye. "Then I'll make a wedding hall," he said, chuckling. He listed off three corners

"The national ethos today is not oriented toward public service," Ashraf Ghani, former minister of finance and now adviser to President Karzai on the transition, told me, "because upward social mobility has not depended on a path of education or skills or others; it is dependent on patronage and on access to Bagram or to Kandahar airport."

For Ghani, the past decade in Afghanistan offers a lesson in what aid cannot accomplish. "Investment in the productive sector requires a national vision and drive, and that does not happen through foreign aid." He pointed out that when the United States rebuilt Japan, Germany, and South Korea, it did so using U.S. government workers. "The USAID of then it is not the USAID of today.

Today it is a contract-management agency," he said. "And the value that drives public servants is very different than the profit motive that drives the private sector."

The country had suffered under misguided economic policies that assumed the forces of the "free market" would kick-start Afghan development. Contracts for projects were awarded to the lowest bidder, regardless of whether they could deliver, and

that an enlightened Afghan economic policy would encourage high-value, labor-intensive farming, such as drying the country's grapes into exportable raisins, or cultivating saffron, the world's most expensive spice. (Opium, incidentally, would fit Byrd's criteria as well.) Afghanistan's substantial mineral resources, which have attracted multibillion-dollar projects from Chinese and Indian mining companies, also hold some promise, but it will be

lometer to build a road. Under Afghan management, he thinks, that cost could be reduced to \$90,000. "This country needs immense infrastructure," he said, "but the way we have to go is to make it affordable."

Ghani—who ran for president in 2009 and is widely expected to run again in 2014—said that despite their failings thus far, the technocrats could seize this last chance at averting economic collapse. "The good



state-owned companies like the now-shuttered cement factory in Baghlan province had been privatized, sold off, and forced to compete on the world market—with the result that Afghanistan was importing Pakistani and Iranian cement to build its internationally funded roads. The industries that were thriving—transportation and construction, for example—were dominated by a handful of families who monopolized access to contracts. "This is not a manifestation of the free market," said Ghani. "It is a manifestation of the market as a jungle."

It's true that, with the labor forces of India, Pakistan, and China nearby, Afghanistan is not well positioned to become an industrial giant. William Byrd, an economist who has studied the country since the 1970s, argues

years before these begin bringing in significant revenue. It also remains to be seen how much mining and cash-crop agriculture will benefit ordinary Afghans, and how the country will avoid the experiences of other resource-rich, infrastructure-poor nations, where most of the profit has ended up abroad.

Ghani said he hoped that the withdrawal of aid could be mitigated by a commitment to public spending from the Karzai government. "We need to return to the New Deal and have a series of public-works programs. Our youth unemployment rate is 40 percent, and we need to address that group, because they are the ones who are going to rip this country to pieces, or put it together." Ghani said that it takes USAID \$600,000 per ki-

news is that rarely in the world do a country and its partners get a three-year advance notice of the coming of such an event."

The new city is geometrically exact, an equilateral triangle with slightly convex sides. At its center is a large park with a tear-shaped lake in the middle. Wide avenues radiate outward in concentric triangles, separating the business, residential, and industrial districts. Where the old city's streets were crowded and hectic, the houses here are set apart by lawns and tidy little sidewalks; it is a green city, full of grass and trees and powered by renewable energy. On the outskirts, there's a farm belt reclaimed from the desert where tranquil little irrigation canals run under footbridges.

Ghulam Hassanzadah, CEO of the new city's development authority, pressed the buttons on the base of the model, lighting up the airport, the ring roads, the schools, and the factories. "Of course, this is the old plan, the one the French made," said Hassanzadah. "The new plan is different."

New Kabul—whose official name is Dehsabz-Barikab City, after the areas northeast of Kabul that it would occupy—is perhaps the most ambitious of all the visions conjured up since 2001 by Afghanistan's would-be nation builders. The first iteration, represented by the model before us, was designed by a French team and called for the entire monumental project to be constructed in one go. In 2009, the Afghan government endorsed a revised plan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)—Japan's version of USAID and the project's largest donor—in favor of a design that could be implemented in stages. The scale of the original plan's ambition, however, remained intact: a city that, over the next thirty years, would grow to hold 3 million inhabitants over an area one and a half times larger than Kabul itself.

The development would solve all the old city's problems—overcrowding, lack of utilities and infrastructure, pollution, and, most important, the imminent water crisis—in one masterstroke. A hydroelectric dam would be built high in the mountains, and water would be piped in from the reservoir it created. The project would also provide funding for new commercial and manufacturing enterprises, only this time it would be geared toward meaningful domestic production instead of consumption. For the moment, though, all that existed of the new city was this model, along with reams of documents and surveys commissioned by Hassanzadah and the Dehsabz-Barikab Development Authority (DCDA).

Hassanzadah is an engineer by training. He left Afghanistan in the 1970s and spent most of his professional life in Germany working for Siemens. In 2001, he came back to help rebuild his native country, but he was disappointed by what had happened since then. "We made some mistakes, some big mistakes, in regard to the

development of this country," he said. "At the moment, we do not have anything we can say we made ourselves."

Hassanzadah had tried to bring Siemens to Afghanistan. He wanted the company to establish a plant for the manufacture of electrical transformers, mining gear, and other industrial equipment in order to fill the demand from dams, power stations, and mines being built all over the country. Hassanzadah told me that Siemens had allocated \$5 million in start-up money to prepare the site, and the company's business plan projected up to \$200 million in revenue within five years. Hassanzadah said that when he met with Karzai in person, the president promised him that Siemens would get land for the factory, even if he had to give them space on his palace grounds.

"Over five years, I tried to get what was promised to me by His Excellency President Karzai," Hassanzadah said. But he kept getting the runaround from the various ministers and aides deputized to take care of the project, and whether because of corruption or incompetence or both, the land never materialized. "Siemens told me, 'Mr. Hassanzadah, stop. Don't tell us stories—the president told you this and this.'" He shook his head sadly. "I lost my face in front of the president of Siemens."

Hassanzadah left the company after that. Now, despite his earlier failure, he has become an evangelist for the promises of the Dehsabz-Barikab project. He played me a short video showing computer renderings of the project: the camera sweeps across a set of train tracks lined on either side by pedestrian walkways, grass, and long rows of poplar trees. A tram glides by, and an enormous glass tower looms in the distance. Finally the camera floats off to the right, panning over a wide canal flanked by terraced gardens, with the Hindu Kush visible in the background.

Like the U.S. State Department's "New Silk Road" strategy, which envisions mountainous, landlocked Afghanistan as a hub of commerce, or the U.S. military's estimate of \$1 trillion in mineral wealth buried in the country, the utopian vi-

sion of the new city is most likely a fantasy. After years of delays, and with the worsening economic and security environment, New Kabul's foreign backers are getting nervous.

When I visited Toshiyuki Iwama, JICA's program director in Kabul, he told me that JICA had suspended its surveying work after his subcontractors had been threatened by powerful land-grabbers, among them a member of parliament. Already, people have encroached on the land set aside for the new city, building brick kilns and setting up boundary walls for houses.

Jolyon Leslie said the project was "visionary, but it's also delusional." The new city would cost around \$34 billion, and nearly 70 percent of that was supposed to come from the private sector. Perhaps the plan would have been possible ten years ago, said Leslie. In the meantime, the real city of Kabul continues to deteriorate. "It's drawn a huge amount of analysis and energy away from here, which is where the problems are," he said. "We can't deal with the city as it is, so let's have a PowerPoint city."

The United States has spent \$592 billion fighting the war in Afghanistan, enough to build New Kabul seventeen times over or give \$17,000—thirty-two years' worth of the country's average per capita income—to every Afghan man, woman, and child. Instead, the city has grown on its own, chaotic and swollen, and Afghans have taken what they can for themselves. A few have made fortunes. Some, like Mohibzada, have built modest, decent lives for themselves at the margins. And until the bubble bursts, the city's grand planners can keep on building models.

Hassanzadah admitted to me that the new city was taking too long to build, but he said that the solution was to grant the DCDA full powers to implement its master plan: "We have to get this city out of the stomach of the government." The key would be for the president to issue a decree that gave Hassanzadah the clear authority to start building. He was sure the president would do so very soon. "We are very, very close," he said. "His Excellency President Karzai promised us." ■

AN OBSESSIVE EMBRACE

Garry Winogrand's late sprint

By Lyle Rexer

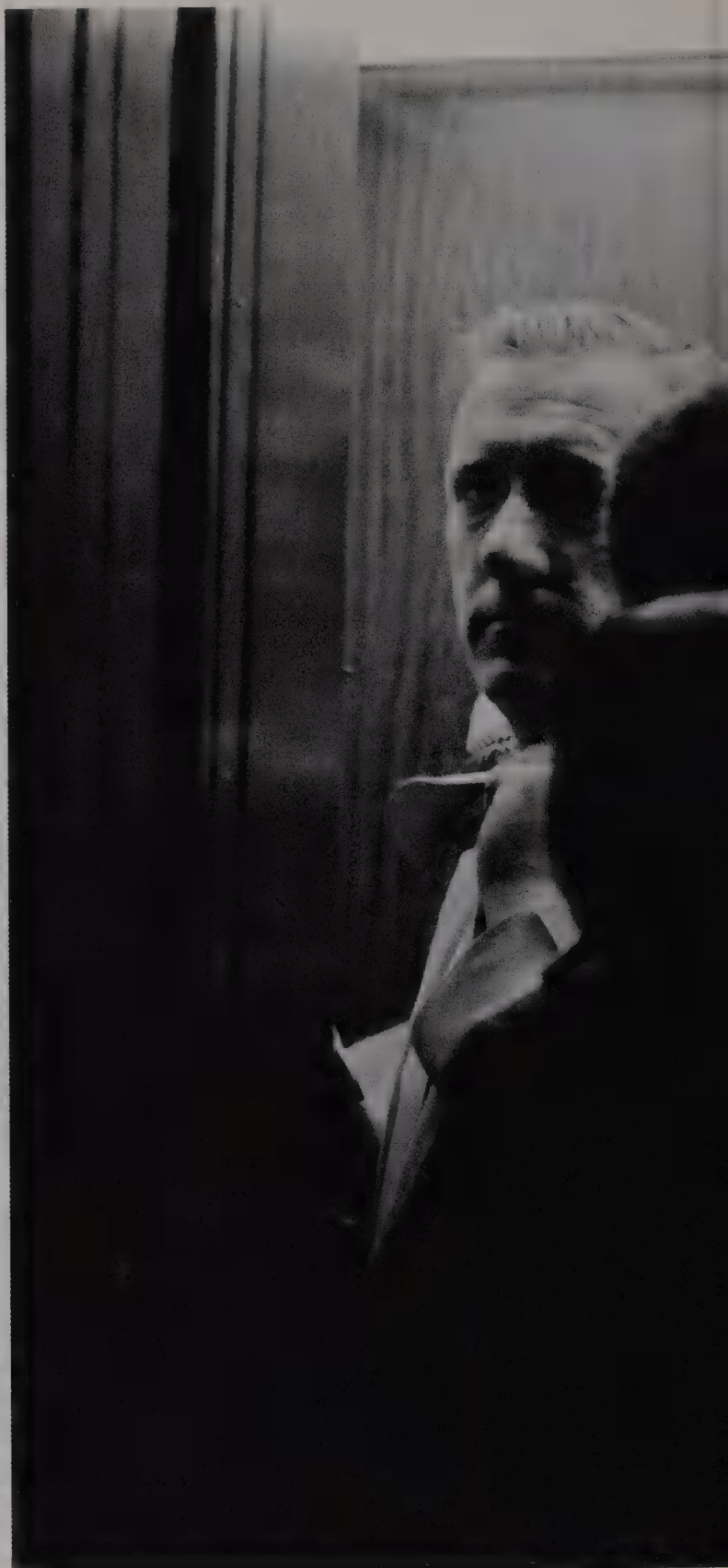


400 ASA is a nimble film. The particles of silver are large enough to capture low light even with a short exposure time. And if the film is “pushed”—underexposing it in the camera and overdeveloping it in the darkroom—it’s possible for a photographer with a steady hand to make sharp pictures even at night. There’s a downside, of course: a graininess and, in full

daylight, an exaggerated contrast that tends to yield a strongly etched, tonally extreme world.

Garry Winogrand shot with 400 ASA black-and-white film, and he pushed it. The film—the camera itself, a sturdy Leica M4—could barely keep up with his desire, which was, simply, to capture everything and everyone he saw. It may be that at the end of his life he really wasn’t a

Lyle Rexer’s most recent book is The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography. He teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.



photographer at all but, as his widow once put it, a “walking raw nerve.”

When he died of cancer in 1984, at age fifty-six, he left behind hundreds of thousands of pictures he'd never actually looked at: 2,500 rolls of exposed but undeveloped film, an additional 4,100 rolls he had processed but not bothered to contact-print, and 3,000 contact sheets he had only cursorily edited. No one would think of filling in a Rembrandt sketch to create a new painting, but that in essence was the choice curators faced and continue to face in assembling shows

from Winogrand's later negatives. No wonder it has taken more than twenty-five years (and at least one hand-wringing symposium) for a truly comprehensive retrospective of Winogrand's work to appear; it goes up in March at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. A team including photographer Leo Rubinfien, Erin O'Toole from SFMOMA, and Sarah Greenough from the National Gallery of Art examined all the extant work. The Winogrand that emerges from the show is more expansive than the one we have known till now, but also more driven.

Left, top to bottom: “New York World's Fair,” 1964, gelatin silver print, collection SFMOMA, gift of Dr. L. F. Peede Jr.; “American Legion Convention, Dallas,” 1964, gelatin silver print, collection of John and Lisa Pritzker; “New York,” 1968, gelatin silver print, collection SFMOMA, gift of Dr. L. F. Peede Jr.



Whereas before he seemed an artist in tune with his time, now he seems an uncontrolled force, someone in pursuit of an impossible goal.

Bronx-born and largely self-trained, Garry Winogrand created a new vernacular of street photography. He broke decisively with the formal precision of Europeans such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, who once said that in aligning a shot “a millimeter makes all the difference”—a carefulness alien to Winogrand’s improvisational style. Those who knew him (and

at least two generations of photographers counted him a friend) describe him as a perpetual prowler with a camera, stoked on coffee, smokes, and jazz; he was uncouth, aggressive, argumentative, nervous, and alive, pushing into the street like a commuter going through a turnstile. In so many of Winogrand’s signature images—a legless beggar in a crowd of uncaring pedestrians; a laughing woman with a melting ice-cream cone in front of a store window with a headless male mannequin; a howling monkey in an open-topped convertible on Park Avenue—we sense



not just their downright oddness but their utter lack of precedent, as if the people he photographed had been imported from another planet. Only slowly do we realize that these are artifacts of camera vision, of a wide-angle lens that isolates tableaux from the intelligible flux. Pulled out of context, they become bizarre, imposing, humorous, *significant*. Winogrand's camera denies the familiar order of things, displaying instead a fugitive one that composes itself just at the edge of our notice, like the line of women sitting on a park bench at the 1964 World's Fair, in another of his most reproduced images. In their leaning and separation, they define a rhythm, like a line of musical notes on a staff.

His early contact sheets tell the story: how he would find a spot, usually around Fifth Avenue in Midtown, where the light was strong, wait until he got a sense of something about to happen, then begin shooting as it came together from a block away—as the woman in the summer dress came toward him and he caught her in full stride, a sidewalk apparition galvanizing the two men in dark suits walking behind her. These are the photographs that made Winogrand famous. Some of them were collected in five slim volumes published during his lifetime, and many of them appeared in a 1988 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The man who organized that show, John Szarkowski, the late curator of photography at MoMA, was one of a handful of people to have seen the full scope of Winogrand's work, and he disliked most of the later photographs, very few of which made it into the retrospective. Szarkowski was the person most responsible for building Winogrand's reputation: he had begun exhibiting the photographer's work immediately upon taking over at MoMA from Edward Steichen. He included a large selection of Winogrand's photographs in the exhibitions *New Documents* (1967) and *Mirrors and Windows* (1978). He put Winogrand up for Guggenheim fellowships and, after the photographer died, recommended to his estate that all the undeveloped film be processed and all the contact sheets be printed. And although Szarkowski called the MoMA retrospective only a provisional assessment, his opinion of the late photographs became the standard judgment.

Szarkowski had doubts about the undeveloped and unedited photographs even before he saw them. After Winogrand's death, he agreed to go through the unedited work but said he was worried it might not be any good. Already Szarkowski was hedging, moving away from something he found wrong or changed in Winogrand's late work. Imagine having the same task with the legacy of a Rothko or a Gorky and wondering whether what



Top: "John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York," ca. 1979
 Bottom: "Los Angeles International Airport," late 1970s. Posthumous digital reproductions from original negatives, Garry Winogrand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona





their studios held was “any good.” But photographs are different; the good and the bad, the banal and the original, the uncertain and the self-assured, jostle each other on the same contact sheet. Often—far more often than critics and curators would like to admit—“genius” in photography is a matter of luck and ruthless editing. By the time Szarkowski wrote the catalogue for the MoMA show, his misgivings had deepened:

The editor’s attention is compromised by impatience, then by aggravation, then by something like anger, and the paranoid suspicion that he is the victim of a plot designed by the photographer to humiliate him.... It seems to me that Winogrand was at the end a creative impulse out of control, and on some days a habit without an impulse, one who continued to work, after a fashion, like an overheated engine that will not stop even after the key has been turned off.

Szarkowski’s faith was especially shaken by Winogrand’s photographs from the American West. We think of Winogrand as a New York photographer, at home in its light-riven grid and its dense human traffic, but in the final decade of his life he was constantly on the road. In 1973 he began teaching at the University of Texas at Austin, and in 1978 he moved to Los Angeles. The photographer Charles Traub remembers seeing Winogrand there

late in 1980. In his capacity as director of New York’s pioneering Light Gallery, Traub had come to Los Angeles to explore the possibility of an expansion. His hotel-room phone rang at 7:00 A.M. “It was Garry,” Traub recalls. “‘Let’s go shoot,’ he said. ‘I’ll pick you up right away.’” Winogrand appeared in his boatlike Cadillac and off they went, the artist steering with one hand and shooting with the other, gathering images seemingly at random while Traub sat nervously in the passenger seat and kept his camera in his lap.

Szarkowski was deeply unsympathetic to such compulsiveness, to the thoughtless collecting of images without the filter of consciousness and the objective of *form*. This aversion explains his limited selection from the unseen work, his dismissal of most of it as the product of a “precipitous decline,” and his effective critical interment of Winogrand’s later work for a generation. It could be that he was right, that the late photographs don’t measure up to the New York work—but he also missed the point of those pictures.

Where Szarkowski found only chaos, negligence, and mistakes in the Los Angeles work—a kind of delusional surrender to chance in the name of art—Leo Rubinfien sees a boundless humanist embrace, at times pessimistic but more often celebratory. In the catalogue for the SFMOMA show, he writes with passionate eloquence about



Top: "San Francisco," 1964, gelatin silver print, Garry Winogrand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Bottom: "Los Angeles," ca. 1974, posthumous digital reproduction from original negative, Garry Winogrand Archive, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona



Winogrand as a kind of Walt Whitman with a camera, humanity's champion in a hectic and jaded age. Rubinfiel took a longer, deeper look at the archive than did anyone else; he was the impetus behind the San Francisco retrospective. "I wanted to prove to myself that he was not a has-been in the work he did in Los Angeles," he explained in a recent interview. "Toward the end of his life Garry felt that he was at the height of his power."

In championing the late work, however, Rubinfiel downplays the very quality that makes Winogrand so compelling (and, to Szarkowski, so unsettling): the obsessiveness of his embrace. Thinking again about Traub's trauma in the front seat of that Cadillac-driven-by-a-camera, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Winogrand's photographing bordered on superstition: clicking the shutter did not merely frame the world; it ratified it. Winogrand once remarked that he wasn't worried about missing a picture while reloading his camera because there was no picture to be had during that moment. By the end of his life, he appears to have been working under the belief that there was no reality unless he photographed it. The late photos have the provocative quality of oracles: cryptic, ambiguous, transcendent. They are objects to be interrogated in spite of—or precisely because of—their seeming randomness. In

image after image, utterly ordinary people solicit our attention: gathering on a street, crossing an empty parking lot at LAX (perhaps it's the incongruity of cowboy hats and briefcases that subconsciously attracted the photographer), sitting in a lawn chair, coming right toward us down the aisle of an airliner. The earlier image of the women on the World's Fair bench is echoed in 1974 by one more distant, diffuse, and puzzling. The subjects, three elderly women and an elderly man, are waiting at a bus stop. The rhythm and relationships are gone, but still the camera has recorded the scene. Somewhere, on film, they exist; somewhere in a vast archive they will never pass away.

Although Winogrand was thirty years early, his work resembles the tide of casual, reflexive imagery washing through social media. His cataloguing seems fundamentally impersonal, as if he were a kind of medium or a precursor to Google's roving cameras. The most arresting, or disturbing, photograph unearthed for the exhibition is a drive-by image of someone—a woman?—lying by the curb in an L.A. street, unnoticed, while the sun pours down and glints off the windows of a nearby car. Did Winogrand even see the person lying there as he drove by, or is the photo evidence of the Leica's prescience, a mechanical intuition that one day someone else might look at the scene and register the body? ■

THE BLOODLINE OF THE ALKANAS

By Cynthia Ozick

Cyrus Alkana was my father, and if you can recognize this name, you belong to an inconspicuous substratum of humanity—a coterie, if such things can still be said to exist. He had his little following, cranks and fanatics like himself, including an out-of-favor critic who once dubbed him the “American Keats.” If this was launched as a compliment, it landed as a disparagement. Keats was exactly the trouble, the reason for my father’s obscurity—and not only Keats, but Shelley and Wordsworth and Coleridge and Tennyson and Swinburne, all those denizens of a fading antiquity.

It wasn’t that my father worshipped these old poets who had crowded the back pages of his grade-school spelling book. He regarded himself as one of their company, a colleague and companion.

It was presumed by his enemies (he had many more of these than readers) that his formal literary education had stopped with those spellers. At sixteen he left Thrace High School for a job as

*Cynthia Ozick is the author of six essay collections and thirteen works of fiction. Her most recent book is a novel, *Foreign Bodies*.*



a copyboy at the *Beacon-Herald*, the local newspaper, snatching stories fresh from the typewriter to speed them to the big clattering Linotype machines. He wasn’t so much running away from school as he was running away from home—there was something at home he didn’t like, some influence or threat that repelled him. It couldn’t have been his parents, because my father always behaved like a man who had been lavishly nurtured, and in marrying my mother he had lucked into the same

cushioned indulgence. Still, some element of family there was that he wanted never again to be close to: a raving sister in an attic, or a herd of brutish cousins who habitually beat him up? He never hinted at anything of the kind; I never heard him speak of family at all. The little that came drifting down to me was only that he lived by himself in a rooming house until he could stiffen his spine for the move to New York.

It was this cramped beginning that led him to the harvesting of enemies. The American Keats, they mocked, was no more than a small-town autodidact. Modernism had left him behind, or else he

had never been aware of its arrival, dizzied as he was by groves and rivulets and dawns and goddesses and nymphs. His mind was afloat with cosmic visions—infinity, and transcendence, and the sublime. Which was the least of it: born into the wrong century, he sometimes spattered his lines with ‘tis and o’er and e’en. These, my mother said in my father’s defense, were conscious grace notes, not, as his accusers claimed, outlandish bad habits.

My mother regularly defended my father. It was he alone who was taking a stand for Beauty, lately driven from the world by the conspiracy of a self-styled avant-garde who despised not merely the cradlings of iambic pentameter but the very skein and pith of magic and mystery. This was how my mother spoke. She had long ago learned to be a copy of my father. She even copied his distaste for me.

At nine I had begun to dismantle all the clocks in our apartment, and soon discovered how to reassemble their parts. Out of waxed paper, school paste, and bits of wood pried from the backs of picture frames, I built fragile model airplanes, with the thinnest of wing struts. At twelve, on purpose to provoke, I announced that I had seen God, and that His name was Geometry. (My father dismissed God; he cared only for the gods.) I was absorbed by shapes and their measurements, the height and width of tables and bureaus and doors, everything hard to the touch and substantially *there*. I determined early on that I would shun the vapor of words my parents exhaled as from some mist-producing internal fungus—my mother's, being imitative, somehow more egregious than my father's. These enveloping clouds of words, and the rapture they induced, my father called the "Bestowal." It was a term I heard often, especially in relation to its absence in me.

"The child lacks it," he would say.

"She is wanting in it," my mother would agree.

They had named me Sidney after a pair of my father's favored poets: Sir Philip Sidney and Sidney Lanier, both of whom, my mother frequently reminded me, "were known to work in your father's vein." She spoke as if they had long ago publicly acknowledged their debt to Cyrus Alkana. I had never cared enough to look up either one.

The Bestowal had come, according to my father, through an ancestral line leading back as far as the poet-prophets Micah and Isaiah, but more immediately through one Rafael Alkana, who was said to have set down torrents of God-praises, in rhyming Ladino couplets, in the margins of his prayer book. In the Inquisitional trauma of that distant departure from a myth-clad Iberia to an equally shrouded Anatolia, the sacred volume was

lost—in shipwreck or conflagration, whichever version one preferred.

"Lost yet not lost," my father said. "Whence, even in the latter-day idiom of the New World, the power of language suffuses the bloodline of the Alkanas." And recited:

Frigate or trireme,
Oarsmen or steam,
Onward they ploughed,
Spirits unbowed,
Unto the invincible dream.

Though *whence* and *unto* were recognizably also among his grace notes, it was unclear whether these lines were his own, or a fragment of some admired minor lyrical Victorian. I did not understand my father's talk. I sensed only that there was some undeniable connection between these enigmatic outbursts and the mundane truth that we were always worrying about money. I was by then a demanding fifteen, shamed by the way we lived in a three-room flat on the fifth floor of a Bronx walk-up. The kitchen window looked out on a narrow shaft that plummeted down into a bleak courtyard mobbed by rows of metal barrels. I slept on a pullout bed abutting a steam radiator, on top of which were heaped the books my father periodically fetched home from the public library at the end of our street, a redbrick Carnegie whose coal furnace shook the building with its winter roar. On the coldest nights I was assaulted by the peculiar odor of heated binding glue.

These books were never the same for long. They changed their colors and thicknesses—some were squat, some tall and lean, and most had slips of paper, my father's scribbles, stuck between the leaves. The library was as far into the outer world as my father was willing to go. "He lives in his head," my mother insisted, and by this she meant me to grasp that my father's cerebrations were the equivalent of what other fathers had: a regular job. And more. In that labyrinthine space, she implied, were museums and galleries and opera houses and lecture halls and cathedrals and landscapes and monuments: the whole of civilization. If his mind was a kind of Parthenon, then what need had he of the common street?

For herself, though, it was different, and for a brief period during my child-

hood (it didn't long outlast my father's contempt), she ran off to the trolley stop on weekend evenings to begin a rattling journey to the city's buzz and hum. There were free excitements everywhere, in cafés and parks and lofts and barrooms so dark you could scarcely see the faces around you, where readers stood at ill-lit lecterns and shot out ugly staccato syllables, the women in shawls and sandals, the half-bald men dangling mournful gray hanks of hair from behind their ears. Sometimes, to rid my father of what he scorned as my prattle, she took me with her. I disliked these forced excursions and their puffed-up dronings. Once, as a bribe, she bought for me from a street vendor a mechanical toy with many moving parts—by shifting them cleverly, you could construct a tunnel or a tower or a bridge. But mostly she went alone, returning breathless and exhilarated and smelling foully of cigarettes. "Barbarians!" she called out to my father. "Nothing down there but ranting pygmies, rotten as rat's hair, no *music* in it, no *sense*, no *vision*, not one in the bunch worth Cyrus Alkana's finger-nail clippings—"

Still, whatever supernal faculty the Bestowal may have conferred on my father, it was she who paid the rent.

"He hadn't planned on it, not in the least," she told me when, embarrassed, I went on pressing her: Why, unlike other men, was my father content to remain unemployed? "Upstate was a desert for a mind like that, so when he came down to New York he thought he'd find work in a publishing house, even if he hadn't a shred of ordinary credentials. They all wanted a college degree. It didn't impress those fools that he'd read absolutely everything. In fact," she reminded me—it was an anecdote I knew by heart—"when I first set eyes on your father, it was in the cellar of a used-book store on Fourth Avenue, and he had his nose in Pindar, of all things!"

I never troubled to discover who or what this Pindar was; it was enough to know that if not for my mother's enchantment in that damp Fourth Avenue cellar twenty years before, I might have been spared the Alkana bloodline. Instead, three months short of what was to have been her graduation from Vas-sar, my mother took a job as a receptionist in a small law firm not far from the

Bronx Zoo, where she could occasionally hear the barks of the sea lions in their outdoor pool. And then began her life as Cyrus Alkana's shield and support. It was a blessing, she said, that he had been forcibly exempted from the tedious world of offices. Her credo—on behalf of my father—was, she informed me, Solitude and Time, those faithful begetters of the muses. Cyrus Alkana's exaltations were not to be distracted by the shabby incursions of the everyday. Most evenings, when she was too tired or impatient to cook, she would bring us dinner in paper cartons from a local eatery, and would soon sit down to the secondhand Remington that occupied the farther end of the kitchen table, a kind of shrine dedicated to my father's papers, many of them accumulated in overflowing folders. Here she would transcribe Solitude and Time's daily yield, emitting joyful little chirps while tapping away until past midnight.

But my father's exertions were not always the melodious lines of those squarish sonnets and spreading odes that so excited my mother. Often they were raging letters flung out at his enemies and detractors, and though my mother might plead and remonstrate, she trusted finally in the sacral might of his every outcry, and in the respectful eye of a just posterity. It fell to me to witness the composition of these diatribes, how he splashed them out ferociously with every dip into the ink bottle (my father despised fountain pens), and how he exulted in wickedly ingenious imprecations, oblivious to my watchfulness. My mother regularly missed these afternoon thunderings. She would depart early in the morning for the sea lions' chorus and be gone until evening, while my school day ended at three; I had all the advantage of seeing Cyrus Alkana actually at work. I had been given my own key, with instructions not to disturb my father's labors.

And sometimes there were no labors. I would find my father in my parents' bedroom, lying down, shoeless, with his pale naked feet dangling like animal parts and his dusty socks curled at one elbow. This pleased me. It meant I would have the kitchen to myself and could slam the icebox door if I liked, or crackle cookie wrappers without being reprimanded. I was tempted to slip back into the bedroom to stare down at

him—it was my only chance to look at my father without having him look back at me. He had a way of twisting his lower lip to show his disappointment. I felt he always saw in me the work of some jealous spirit (he pretended to believe in such things), his bad luck in having spawned an Alkana perversely passed over by the whims of the Bestowal. He had small close-set very black eyes rimmed by short sparse reddish lashes, placed not quite horizontally (the left one seemed to list toward an ear) in a big head made bigger by a bulky bush of red hair. His eyebrows too were red. Adam, he liked to say, was made of red clay, but his own ruddiness was inherited from King David; I think he was burdened by the inescapable notice it commanded. A tiny tic or tremor went on pulsing through the shut lids. He was sleeping deeply, snoring with drumlike monotony. It was somehow understood between us that I was not to disclose these instances of idleness to my mother. She was confident that his ambition, like her belief in him, was indefatigable.

And it was because of her relentless advocacy that my father began at last to see his things in print. "His things"—this was how my mother, who rarely spoke simply, spoke of Cyrus Alkana's elevated verse. It was the simplicity of humbled gratitude: she knew herself to be the privileged guardian of a fabled cache of royal jewels about to be put out for public display. Each a peerless emerald or pearl, they had all, one by one, been denied publication by this or that obtuse periodical. But my mother had been too shy. Her newest idea was that a volume of these resplendent strophes, strung together like some priceless Oriental necklace, must irresistibly dazzle even the dullest editorial eye—in pursuit of which she typed, she admired, she inspired, she burnished, and you could almost say she influenced. And certainly she wrapped the finished product in carefully smoothed-out brown paper cut from grocery bags, wrote down the publisher's address in her best Palmer script, and carried the precious package to the post office to be weighed and stamped and sent off to its fate. In our family, it was my mother who was in charge of outgoing mail.

But because one's fate is what one must create (her favorite homily), she had already set in motion something else. On a rainy Saturday afternoon when my father had gone out, hatless as always, his hair jutting floridly over his ears, on one of his impulsive rambles to the public library, I heard my mother at the Remington, typing more slowly than usual, stopping and then starting again, with long silences in between. It was not her ordinary pace, that rapid and even cadence of a practiced amanuensis.

She looked up when she felt me watching from the doorway.

"Don't dare ask me what I'm doing," she ordered. "I have to *think*—can't you see I'm thinking?"

"About what?"

"Getting them to pay attention. Publishers. Editors. You have to have a hook."

It wasn't, I knew, that she thought me worthy of being her confidante. But since a conspirator must have an accomplice, even if an inferior one, she earnestly pumped out the rest: "A celebratory imprimatur. An introduction, a kind of preamble. Or call it a preface. That's what I'm doing."

Whatever she was finally willing to name it, it described the poet's circumstances from his birth in backward Thrace to the present flowering of his genius, citing his resemblance to the grandest bards of Albion—and it went off together with each brown-paper packet. Whether or not the tone of these glorifications was persuasive, I could not judge; it was out of my ken and over my head. And my father, it seemed, was kept out of it from the start. Yet what came of it all was three startlingly immediate offers of publication, one from a respected old press (this she quickly dismissed), and the others from two large commercial houses known for their popular successes.

My mother was elated. "We'll go with the biggest fish," she told me. "A reward for swallowing the bait."

The biggest fish, she admitted, had proposed a minnow of an advance while stipulating a single indispensable condition: that the bait be included in the body of the book itself as an enticing illumination of Cyrus Alkana's lines. I saw her hesitate; she had to think it over, she said. She had schemed it only as a worm on a hook, she hadn't ex-

pected to go public with it. In the end she had to agree: why lose the big fish for the sake of withholding the inconsequential worm? With a quick little turn of her lip I could almost take for smugness, she confessed a covert devising: the sole signatory to the gushing endorsement she had quietly fabricated was Alexander Alcott.

She had made me her reluctant confederate; it was a name even I could recognize. You couldn't speak, in those years, of an Eliot or a Pound without, for fairness, adding an Alcott. Alexander Alcott was chief among my father's enemies, routinely reviled together with those graven grand luminaries, the acknowledged titans of modernism. That such rarefied figures could be so readily familiar to me, I owed to my father's raucous and tireless hatreds.

"But does he know you've done that?" I asked.

My mother let out an impatiently innocent grunt. "Does who know what?"

"Alexander Alcott. That you used his name that way."

"Oh, I don't need that fool's permission for anything. Besides, I told them over there that I had it—publishers make such fusses over nonsense."

"But what if he finds out and sues?"

"Lawyer talk at your age? Sidney dear, you're a bit of a fool yourself. He's bound to find out—think of the publicity that's coming! It won't make a bit of difference to him, he's got fame enough to spare, and he's worthless anyhow. The fellow's nothing but a pestilence, and these days it's pestilence that wins the prizes and the prestige. He's *listened* to, more's the pity, his rubbish gets taught in the schools, he's in all the anthologies, and Lord knows your father isn't, not yet—"

She went on in this way, and though I resented being called a fool, I was more frightened than hurt. I thought her horribly reckless.

A good-sized volume of Cyrus Alkana's verses, under the unwieldy title *Thou Shouldst Be Living at This Hour*, was brought out the following spring. It was reviewed here and there and could be glimpsed, spottily, in the bookstores, but soon disappeared. My mother blamed this short shelf life on the miscalculation of a long-winded title; she took the trouble to inform

me, with an uneasy sigh, that my father, who relied on her for much else, had insisted on it. When I dared to ask him what it meant, he rolled his eyes and puckered his bottom lip and said only that it was something out of Wordsworth anyone with a brain in her head ought to know.

I had intended this mostly innocuous question as a preliminary breach into more dangerous territory: what I really hoped to hear was what my father thought of Alexander Alcott's incursion into Cyrus Alkana's inviolate precincts. I opened my mouth and nothing came out. I hadn't the courage to put it to him.

Instead I appealed to my mother.

"He still doesn't know it was you. Shouldn't he *know* who wrote that stuff?"

"If you tell him, my dear Sidney, I'll poison your cocoa," she said mildly. "And don't call it stuff, it's an appreciation. He understands it was the publisher who wanted it—the sales people over there, for the noise it would make. Well, we've been *having* a bit of noise, haven't we? People are noticing."

"But how can he *like* it? He can't like it, can he?"

"The idea of your father liking the likes of an Alexander Alcott—what a joke! He despises him, you've heard it yourself, those blistering letters, look how he keeps me up every night typing whatever's got stuck in his craw. Not that the ones to Alcott ever get into the mailbox."

"They don't?"

"And why should they? It wouldn't be politic, not when he's been so gracious and helped us out and done us a service. Listen, dearie," she said, "this Alcott's a rascal like the rest of them, and it gives your father no end of pleasure to see some fool of a charlatan come crawling on his knees, flattering and fawning away in that nice little preface of his."

"Your nice little preface—"

"That's only a quibble. Your father, wonderful man, takes it as a vindication and a surrender, and so do I. Imagine, here's the venerated Alexander Alcott practically admitting that in the war between the Pure and the Sham, it's the Pure that carries the day."

She had flown into the Alkana sublimine once again, and I could almost see the capital letters in the shine of her eyes.

There was no review, meanwhile, that did not remark on the seeming anomaly of Alexander Alcott's exuberant praise for a sensibility so radically different from his own. The disparity was so glaring, *The Nation* admonished, that it could hardly have been inspired by collegial generosity: Alkana and Alcott were no more colleagues than they were brothers in arms, and it was an exceedingly strange pod that could contain two such unlike peas. This, it turned out, was to become the general theme among Alkana's small sect of reviewers. Why had a sophisticated artist imbued with the subtlest vibrations of the *Zeitgeist* lent his influence to the grotesque delusions of an archaist? The wonderment was so intense, and so confounding, that it brought on a second edition. The impetus for this miracle bubbled up, to start with, at those notorious dinner parties run by the literary set, a pack of up-to-date gossips (this was my mother's view) who followed the critics solely in order to tear into their arguments. From this narrowest of sanctums a wildfire of curiosity began to spread into the larger arena of the magazines: Why had Alcott done it? And then: But *had* he done it? It was impossible, it made no sense, so vast a reputation stooping to crown with such extravagant laurels a negligible versifier—a mere mimic of the outmoded.

Outmoded? Cyrus Alkana spat out his grievance in phalanxes of rancor rushed off to the journals that spurned him. Did his assailants suppose they owned the language from the root up, and could do with it, by seigneurial right, whatever they wished? And what they wished to do with it, my father declaimed, was to pull off their shallow showy tricks—they said it themselves, straight out! These jabbering fakers mooing away at their slogans: Make it new, break it down, chop it up, thin it out! And all of it morose, and ugly, and desolating, a wasteland! It wasn't only the language they were after, it was the tongue and the teeth and the eyeballs and the optic nerve itself, until they got all the way back into the human brain, to modernize even that.

Yet Cyrus Alkana was acquiring a faction of his own: he had his loyal little junta, the hot-blooded coven of his fans. The critic who had named him the American Keats now com-

pared him with the school of Rembrandt—those ingenious disciples whose paintings, far from being imitations, “quaffed from the selfsame celestial spring.” How these accolades animated my mother! Praise for my father might be too sparse, or too bizarre, or too strenuously infatuated, but it satisfied her that after so many years in exile he had attained the recognition he had always deserved. It appeared not to trouble her that we still lived as thinly as we had before.

My father may have arrived at a kind of fame, but even I could see that it came not so much from his devotees as from his detractors. The ongoing flood of those assaults on his enemies (you couldn’t class it as correspondence, since there were never any answers) brought him, it developed, more notice from the reigning literati than whatever fading rumble was left of the shock of publication. There was no third edition. No one turned up to interview him. Occasionally the odd essay or two, like shards churned out of the dry soil of an abandoned dig, would crop up in this or that marginal journal. It might be a zealous study of the titular “Thou”—did it address the poet’s soul, or the solitary reader, or the spirit of Wordsworth himself? Or else it would happen that Cyrus Alkana was cited in some university panel on forgotten minor figures.

In the two quiet years following what my mother happily went on calling my father’s “apotheosis,” the deepest and most perplexing silence was the terrible muteness of Alexander Alcott. I had been wildly apprehensive all along. He had been the object of the minutest inquisitiveness; his repute had been usurped, even molested; some hinted at blackmail. And still he held his tongue. He made no mention of the abuse of his name. He wrote and spoke nothing in public or, as far as anyone could tell, in private. He raised no accusation or threat of anything remotely punitive. Week after week, month after month, I had been fearing a thunderclap: a dangerous letter, or the door bursting open, with police in pursuit. Again and again I badgered my mother. Why was she so indifferent, how could she be so certain that there wouldn’t be some sudden repercussion, a disgrace that

might fall on us at any moment, and what would she do then?

“Oh, we’re just fleas as far as he’s concerned,” she said, waving me off. “He doesn’t take any notice, we’re nothing to him, it would only be a come-down for the high-and-mighty Alexander Alcott to be bothered with us.”

“Is that why you took the risk? When you really don’t know anything about him, the way he thinks, how he might take it—”

“How he might take it? You can see how he’s taken it. He doesn’t care. There never *was* a risk.”

But another time she had a more deliberate argument.

“Did it ever occur to you,” she began, “that the fellow might actually *admire* your father?”

“How could he? You’re always saying they have nothing in common, they’re opposites.”

“And out of opposition affinity grows. Suppose he’s finally allowed himself a good look at what he said about your father—”

“What *you* said.”

“—and recognized the truth of it.”

“The truth of what?”

“The truth of falling in love. A sort of conversion,” she said, and here her voice, which was ordinarily excitedly soprano, darkened into a clairvoyant hush. “He has nothing to complain of, he doesn’t make a fuss, he leaves us alone. Because he’s satisfied, because he *sees*. Because he *knows*.”

I could only stare; there was nothing more to say. I was by now in my last year of high school, and had absorbed enough of her willfulness to recognize that this newest theory was as capricious as it was preposterous. The modernist Alcott suddenly smitten by the antiquarian Alkana! And all of it resting on (what else could it be called?) a forgery. She had robbed him of his name; now she stood ready to concoct his inmost sentiments. There was more at stake than my childhood notions had been able to swallow, when I was repeatedly told that my father was genuine and noble and that his enemies weren’t. And if proof was wanted, only see: his lines rhymed, and theirs didn’t.

The next afternoon, when my father was again napping—his naps were becoming longer and more frequent—I put on my galoshes and walked through

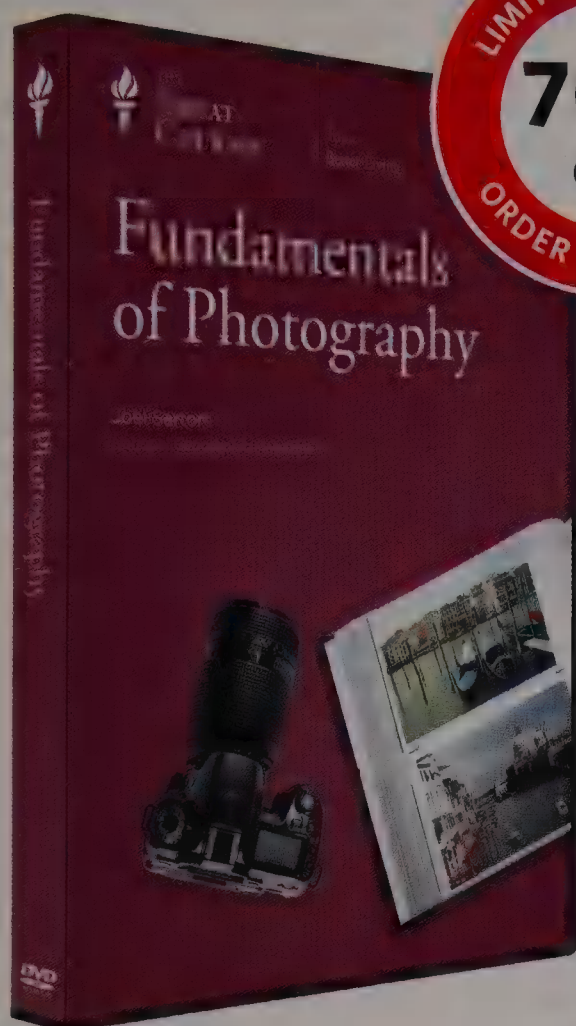
rapidly thickening snow to the public library. My arms were heavy with pretext: my mother, frugal as always, frowning on overdue fines, had instructed me that morning to return my father’s latest batch of borrowed books, still piled on the radiator next to my bed. I was used to their hot smell, but had scarcely noticed their titles—the same hoary bards, the same sunsets and rivers and dryads, the same blurry infinities of a gods-infested cosmos. Except for the preoccupied librarian at the desk, who appeared to be sorting through a file drawer of index cards, the reading room was deserted and nearly silent; there was only the distant subterranean growl of the ancient furnace under our feet. The storm had done its work—I had the place to myself, and uninterrupted hours before me. And in this fortuitously secret space, below high windows palely lit and snow-muffled, I found the man I had come to look for: my father’s enemy, my mother’s dupe.

Or almost found him. The more I followed his tracings—he seemed to be everywhere—the more elusive he grew. Even so, you couldn’t escape him. He took up whole chapters in one academic study after another, he proliferated in the bibliographies, and in the dictionaries he turned up between *alcohol* and *alcove*. Two or three essays in the serious journals attempted to uncover a venerable literary connection: Was he a descendant of those estimable New England idealists, the Brook Farm Alcotts? Could he claim a cousinship, however distant, with the admirable Louisa May? There was no conclusive proof favoring a yes or a no; the genealogical paths were murky.

None of this mattered to me, none of it counted. It was the living man I was after, so I burrowed into the glossy weeklies, into those “human interest” articles that confirm renown by adding to it. His name and his fame were titillating enough to land him there, among the politicians and movie stars. But Alexander Alcott disdained the public. He declined to be photographed. As I leafed through mounds of mostly stale magazines I came upon plenty of photos—all of them, disappointingly, of the poet’s house, taken from different angles. A modest stucco, set back from a countrified road. Rosebushes on either side of a door painted red.



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Here and there, speculations seeped through—a marriage to an older widow who died; a speech hindrance, slight, intermittent, the cause of a raw self-consciousness. But these were only stories sprinkled among other stories. He lived alone. He disliked leaving his house, though some could remember how, long ago, when he was still in his twenties, he had gone roaming with other would-be young poets, scions of the new movement, to recite in parks and cafés. He was the only one to have lasted. The rest ended mainly as stockbrokers or insurance men; and two drank themselves to death. Of his childhood, I could discover nothing at all. It was as if he had been born out of a crater in the moon, and it gave me a chill to read that he was known to be irascible, a man with a heavy temper and a hidden grudge. Or was it that the librarian, closing for the day, had already shut down the heat?

It struck me as odd (I thought of my mother's cryptic affinity of opposites) that Alexander Alcott, exactly like my father, was unwilling to step past his own threshold; and that he, too, was easily roused to rage. A hollow equation: despite these echoing traits, Alcott was everywhere revered—he was in all the magazines!—while my father was more and more falling into eclipse.

By the time I got home, the snow had crept up to my ankles, and my mother was standing at the stove, stirring a pot. It was an unfamiliar scene. Her office had been dismissed earlier than usual. Even the neighboring sea lions had been herded indoors to avoid the rough weather.

She was quick to confront me. "Sidney!" The name itself was accusation; peevishly, she tugged at my wet sleeve. "Look at you, your hair all soaked through. What in the world have you been up to, what kept you so long?"

I had prepared a covering lie. When I told it, it sounded true. What need had my mother of the actual Alcott, when she so relished her moist inventions? And I hated the hobbling weight of my hair; she had forced me to let it grow to below my waist ("pre-Raphaelite tresses," she said) to please my father.

"I got to looking through a bunch of college catalogues," I threw out, "and I think I've found just the place I want."

"And what place is that?"

On the spot I hatched a name. "Kansas Polytech. For engineering."

"Girls can't be engineers," my mother said. "They won't let you, it's not any sort of normal occupation for a girl. Besides, who's going to pay for your room and board way off in some godforsaken nowhere? Not to mention the tuition, when right here you've got a perfectly fine city college that won't cost a penny—"

"You know my grades are good. I'll get a scholarship."

From his customary chair, his elbows lost in a surf of papers, my father growled, "Ah, let her go. The Bestowal's skipped her anyhow."

The Bestowal? I was past seventeen, sick of all such illusions, and more than ready to flee our moonbeam lives. It was math, it was physics, it was logic and dirt I was after, and brick and steel and concrete—solid everyday things—and how a bridge can curve in the air like an arrow in flight, with seemingly nothing to keep it there. Some months afterward, I did in fact win a scholarship, not to some mythically faraway Kansas but to an even more distant yet beckoning Texas: a full scholarship, along with a gratifyingly ample stipend. My mother in her melancholy letters never stopped insisting that I had been invited to study structural engineering at Texas A&M solely because of someone's mistaken impression that

Sidney was a boy.

Until my father died nearly four years later, at the start of my last semester, I never went home; I was glad to put half a continent between us. And then, as it happened, I was compelled to miss the funeral. A freak autumn blizzard followed by massive flooding had drowned Texan highways and railroad tracks, thwarting travel. My mother sadly reported that there were only three at the graveside: herself, the librarian from down the street, and the man who had named my father the American Keats; it was he who recited ("by heart," my mother wrote) Cyrus Alkana's fourteen-stanza "Ode to the Aegean Cybele." She had been lamenting my father's decline all along, week after week, year after year: how the afternoon naps were now beginning in the mornings, and how, little by little, he had given up castigating his enemies—because finally there were no

more enemies. No one took any notice, good or bad, of Cyrus Alkana: it had come to that. There were no new verses. The Remington was silent. The books languishing on the radiator, browning at their margins, had become shockingly overdue, until the librarian herself came to collect them. The heap of folders on the farther end of the kitchen table remained stagnant. "From the peak of Darien," my mother summed up, "to the Slough of Despond." She had retired to care for my father; she had a small pension.

There was no mention of Alexander Alcott. The name and the incident had receded into worse than oblivion—into a kind of caricature, an ephemeral embarrassment in the long march of my mother's besotted loyalty to Cyrus Alkana. Even the troubled shame her deceit had once caused me, and my own childish terror of retribution, had faded away. I was preoccupied now with weight-bearing walls, I had begun designing simple beams and columns, I was learning to calculate the load capacity of steel. In thrall to my slide rule and gravity's recalcitrance, I was, finally, freed from the lying romance of my father's house.

To celebrate, I cut my hair very short, close to the scalp. In the mirror I saw the head of a boy. It pleased me to have acquired the look of a proper engineer. I tossed away my dresses and skirts, and took to wearing pants and rough shirts that buttoned the wrong way. In the campus cafeteria, crammed into a twenty-five-cent automatic photo booth, I sat for my portrait. With a mechanical click, a long row of boys' heads emerged from a slot. The most cheerful of the bunch I mailed to my mother. She never acknowledged it.

But when the floods had dried up and the rails were cleared, and my father had been in his grave for nearly a month, my mother wrote urgently again, begging me to come: What was to be done with his precious papers, his treasure trove, his golden egg, his soul's lantern, was it all to be condemned to perpetual night? Whom could she turn to for advice? She was helpless: the lone votary who had likened my father to Keats was useless for practical matters, not a thread or shred of any other literary connection remained, and only she and I were witnesses to the glory that lay in the scores

of bulging folders she was daily uncovering in neglected corners and closets.

I dreaded those papers, and suspected her intent. Surely she didn't suppose that I would gaze, admire, and at last be swept away—what was the Aegean Cybele to me? She knew my detachment. Or did she imagine (and what might my mother *not* imagine?) that I could somehow lead her to certain grandly monumental Texan libraries eager to enshrine Cyrus Alkana's hallowed archive? I was, despite all, an authentic Alkana—of the bloodline, if not of the Bestowal. She meant to lure me back, to draw me in—to keep me imprisoned in that dank emptiness that was just now invading my lungs as I climbed the stairs to my parents' old flat.

The grimy fake-marble steps and the iron balustrade with its rusting scrolls were the same as they had always been. The shrunken hallways and dusky stairwells groaned out their old echoes. Even the smell of the place was everything I remembered: a sour fume of changelessness, defeat, aging. Silence and loneliness. Two flights above (I had by now arrived at the third-floor landing) a muddy wash of voices swelled and ebbed—and then I heard the shutting of a door, and downward footsteps.

I looked up, and looked again; I stood where I was. Through the gaps in the railings I saw a man descending. One hand slid lightly along the banister, the other gripped a fedora. He was moving easily, firmly, confident of his tread. He wore a long tweed coat with a velvet collar. His shoes were impeccable, the leather unscuffed, the laces orderly. On the fourth-floor landing, glancing down, he hesitated, startled; clearly he had expected the way to be unobstructed. But I stood where I was, taking him in. I recognized the ruddy mass of his hair, the color now much subdued, the wilderness of it tamed and civilized. He had grown a pinkish mustache, overrun by white, that oddly hid his upper lip. As he came nearer, I caught the tilt of his left eye listing toward an ear, like a skiff about to capsize—but his gait was strong, he was robust all over, and he passed me by with a stranger's nod. My tongue felt frozen in my mouth. How could he know me, with my boy's head, and my pants and borrowed lumber jacket?

It was my father. I had never before seen him so well dressed.

Ruse! Deceit! Lie! The pretext of his papers? No, the unthinkable, the heinous: my mother the trickster! Had she concocted his decline and his dying, and all of it to snatch me back?

I took the last two flights at a gallop, and faced the door that would open into the life I had repudiated—that enervated life of mist and chimera. Into the scarred lock I thrust the old key my mother had pressed on me long ago. It had taught me to be surreptitious.

She was standing at a window, looking into the street below—watching, I thought, my father go. But where? And in a coat with a velvet collar! When she turned, alerted by the cat's squeal of the doorknob, I saw how the skin of her jaw hung loose, and how sparse, nearly naked, her eyebrows had become.

But her voice was lively. "Oh, what a pity, such a pity," she sang out. "Here you are, and you've just missed him." And then: "Sidney! Your hair, what have you done to yourself? Just look at you, what a getup, I couldn't believe that photo, how your father would be appalled—"

She spoke as if the years of my absence had all at once dissolved, as if my having just then materialized was no more than a daily commonplace.

But I would not allow her to distract me. "You made me come back," I said: bitterly, coldly. "And all for nothing."

"For nothing? If only you'd got here on time! He sent a note ahead—it went to the publisher, so it was delayed almost a week, it turned up only the day before yesterday, and by then you'd left, you were on the train for sure, there was no way I could let you know. How I wish you had seen him!"

"Let me know?" I could catch hold only of the tail of this whirlwind. "I did see him," I said. "On the stairs, coming down, he didn't recognize me—"

"Condolences, he called it. But Sidney, it was so much more, and imagine, Alexander Alcott right in this very spot! In this very room!"

A rush of shame; the fury drained out of my throat. She was pulling at my sleeve—her old proprietary habit—and I followed where she led. Was she the captive of a delusion? She was ill, her senses were deteriorating, she believed my father was dead, and not five minutes ago I had seen him alive! And hale! And

in a coat with a velvet collar! And worse, horrifyingly worse: she had mistaken him for his most hated antagonist.

The kitchen table was littered with remnants of a repast: empty teacups and lavish little colored cakes of a kind that had never before appeared in our household. A sugar bowl where once stood a perpetual bottle of ink. The Remington, too, gone from its place, as if a cavity had been carved out of the air.

"You see," she said, "he even brought me these pretty petit fours, that's how gentlemanly he was! And he told me things I never knew, things your father kept to himself."

It was brutal to listen to. I could think of nothing to say to these muddles, and while she went to find another cup for me (she filled it with weak tea grown cold), I looked all around, searching for evidences of my father: some vagrant sheet with his obsessive scratchings, an ink-stained pamphlet with a note stuck in it, his coddled old dipping pen. There were only the bare plates and their pink and yellow crumbs.

"I always understood it was Cain and Abel between those two," she went on, "but I never dreamed they'd been so young, boys no more than fifteen or so, hotheads, a falling-out like that, and even now it isn't clear who was Cain and who was Abel, except that he had that lip all covered up—"

It was unendurable. I broke in headlong: "What boys, for God's sake? And where was he going just now? He never used to bother about a hat."

"Oh Sidney, don't be so dense"—her old tone. "Can't you see how remarkable it is? That he *came*? That he was here? He saw the obituary, a tiny little thin thing, no more than six lines, it didn't at all add up to your father's proper stature, but still, the blood between them—"

"Blood? What are you saying?"

"The blood of the Alkanas. That's what brought him."

She told me then what she admitted she had always known. It was my father's great secret, she said, he had never once spoken of it, and she had never violated what she perceived to be a sacred ban—a ban rooted in an insatiable rage; or in guilt; or in shame. Or perhaps even in fossilized indifference. But she had known his secret for years and had, in truth, known more of it than he knew himself.

All this I submitted to with a skepticism mixed with fear: What fraud was she brewing now? The purposeful drama of it, her small pale eyes theatrically effulgent, where was she intending to take me?

"I saw him just that one time," she said, "on Bleecker Street, down a staircase into a smoky cellar, candles set in saucers, a dozen chairs in a circle, that sort of place. A reading along with two others, vile simpleminded stuff, red wheelbarrows and chickens, he didn't read well at all, and he had that little notch over his mouth. He was already calling himself by that pretentious name he took on, not that it had any shine to it then. But I knew right away."

It was as if she was drawing me on with tightening straps, and where was she taking me?

I asked, "What did you know?"

"The hidden thing. That my husband had a brother."

And again, cautiously: "How could you know that? If you never saw him before?"

"Because of the resemblance. Except for that notch. And when I got home that night, I never told your father any of it."

The illogic, the waywardness! The fantasy, the delusion!

I surrendered docility and tore into her. "You ran into someone years ago who looked a little like my father and you decided he was my father's brother—"

"What a fool you are, you have no imagination, you don't understand, you can't see! There wasn't an iota of difference, every cell of him, every grain and pore of him, every hair on his head! Identical! And that's the one the world adores, not your father, they throw garlands around his neck ... how your father despised that man, and he had no inkling ..."

Her face collapsed into its grooves, and it came to me—heavily, grievously, ruinously—that my mother's trick was not of this moment. It was lifelong. My father and his dithyrambs were dead, obliterated, and the man in the coat with the velvet collar was his enemy, whom the world had wreathed in garlands.

But still she was dogged, and it spiraled out, the maelstrom of it, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Cyrus and Alexander, all of them twinned in the womb, contending even there. And then the falling-out,

the horrid divide, that delta of flesh cut out of a lip, the blood, the outcry. "You can't really get a good look at it," she said, "a bit of a slash, like a sewed-up harelip, it was only one of those little pocket knives, an argument between boys, that's what he was telling me—"

An argument between boys? Prodigious boys, extraordinary boys, boys who were already preserving their verses in packets tied with knotted string, wondrous and singular boys, though doubled by the bloodline of the Alkanas. And it was over the bloodline of the Alkanas that they fought: whether it was destined to course through the cosmos or through a grain of sand, whether it was to be venerable and honored or new-made and radical, whether it was sunk in overgrown ancient scum or alive in the pulse of the modern—even then, even then, in their teens! Not over a skate or a pair of purloined socks, or whatever trivial spats ordinary boys turn into wars. The knife that sliced the lip might easily, by a finger's length, have pierced eye or throat—his brother's knife, captured and wielded by your father. One boy owned the knife, the other used it. The intent to maim, mutual. The rage, mutual. How alike they were, striving for supremacy! And then he ran away, your father, who might so easily have blinded his brother, or killed him ...

My mother recited these passionate claims with a strained breathlessness, while I, disbelieving, shocked into ridicule, went on numbly stirring my pallid tea. "Are you telling me—did he tell you—that it was a fight over ... style?"

"You stupid engineer!" she cried out. "All you have any feeling for is dust—bricks, concrete, who knows what you're after, looking like that, and you a born Alkana! It was the Bestowal, it was your father fighting against the tide! Even then, he would never go with the tide, don't you see? And in spite of it, when it comes to the marrow of things, there's not a droplet's difference between them ... Do you know why that man came today? Do you understand why?"

"No," I said.

"And just think how worried you once were, how afraid you were that he'd punish us."

"It was long ago," I said.

"I knew he'd never harm us. I always knew it."

"You stole his name, you abused him."

"Oh, his name! He gave up his name, didn't he? He got rid of it—not to be tainted by his brother, his derided brother, his brother the ... *archaist*." The word was ruthless: she trickled out a covetous little laugh, half pain, half victory. "It was his fame I stole. For your father's sake, to catch the world's eye, to get him into print. But I knew," she breathed out grandly, "he'd never harm us."

"My father was harmed. You made him a butt."

"You're hard on me, aren't you? When all my life I've been a person of forbearance. I never let on to your father that the man he most detested carried his own blood in his veins."

"His blood, his veins! How could you not expect some retaliation—at least a protest? How could you not? You gave out a hundred different reasons—"

"There was only one reason."

Again the tightening straps; the reins were now wholly in her hands.

I asked, "And what was that?"

"He didn't mind. It's exactly the thing he came to tell me. That he didn't mind, he'd never minded. And I always trusted that he wouldn't. Because," she persisted, "they were breast to breast even before they were born."

She stopped and looked me over; her nostrils danced in wary distaste. I saw that she was judging me less by what she took to be my indecency of feeling than by my shorn boy's head.

When I left her—she didn't try to keep me, after all—I understood that my guileless mother would go on believing forever in the binding force of the bloodline of the Alkanas. And I made no further move to dispute it.

It was the librarian from down the street who salvaged my father's papers. They were stored in the library's cavernous underground—one hundred and twenty-three cardboard boxes of unsorted manuscripts, some typed, many more handwritten in the blue-black ink he favored—"awaiting," my mother wrote in the last letter I ever had from her, "the unborn critic who will restore him to his rightful peers." But when some years later a nearby water main burst and inundated the old building's outmoded electrical and heating systems, the library had to be demolished (no engineer would touch it), washing away what a very few still revere as Cyrus Alkana's lordly if unsung art. ■

NEW BOOKS

By Tom Bissell

In 70 A.D., a few decades after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem after a long siege. Perhaps no event has had more enduring reverberations. Judaism lost the Second Temple, the site of

feat: today, on the former site of the Second Temple stands the Aqsa Mosque, the faith's third most important devotional site. The Roman Church, the rise of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, the creation of Israel



nearly all its rites, and the temple was never rebuilt. Jewish Christianity, centered in Jerusalem and led by James the brother of Jesus, soon disappeared beneath the waves of Gentile Christianity. Islam, too, was shaped by the de-

Tom Bissell's most recent book, *Magic Hours*, an essay collection, was published last year by McSweeney's.

itself—all can be traced back, in some way, to Jerusalem's ancient destruction.

We have exactly one contemporary account of this event, and its author was one of the most complicated men ever to have lived. Joseph ben Matathias was born in Jerusalem in 37 A.D., a moderate Pharisee from a family of moderate Pharisees, and was appointed



to a generalship in the Jewish resistance against the Romans. When he was cornered in a cave near Jotapata with fifty other men, Joseph assented to his comrades' wish for a mass suicide. Everything went according to plan, save for the fact that Joseph neglected to kill himself. Captured by the Romans, he was soon enough collaborating with them. When the war was over, he went to Rome, where he was given a pension by the new emperor, Vespasian, and asked to write a history of the war that would burnish his patron's honor.

The man soon known as Titus Flavius Josephus became a Jewish apologist to the Romans and a Roman apologist to the Jews (whom he endeavored to depict as an estimable people divinely guided through history). He wrote four books, including a brief autobiography, the earliest-known example of the form to survive into the modern age. His works of history, *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*, are the source of virtually all our knowledge about the time of Jesus outside the gospels. Without Josephus, we would know next to nothing about the Herodian dynasty and Pontius Pilate and would have no idea that the girl who called for the head of John the Baptist was named Salome.

In *A JEW AMONG ROMANS: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS* (Pantheon, \$28.95,

pantheonbooks.com), the prolific Frederic Raphael, who is perhaps best known for writing the screenplay for Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, argues that Josephus was something more than a collaborator or (as the Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin, who excavated Masada, once described him) "a bad Jew." Josephus was a prototype, "the first Jew to offer an overview of the world's history and evolution that was not Judeocentric." Raphael's magnificently odd book does not skimp on details about the life of Josephus (whose Greek citations have been translated by Raphael himself), but the real focus is on his legacy. What does it even mean to have been a bad Jew in a war as hopeless as the Jewish War, which was not only a popular rebellion against an occupying power (though it was that) but also a bloodthirsty civil war among sometimes deranged factions given to show trials and shocking cruelty? Crazy men with beards ruin everything—a problem that is with us still.

Raphael transforms Josephus, the thinking person's Judas, into a figure of tragic grandeur and connects him to a wide array of other Jewish writers, artists, and scapegoats from Benedict de (or Baruch) Spinoza, Alfred Dreyfus, and Leon Trotsky to Isaac Babel, Walter Benjamin, and Joseph Roth. "His art," writes Raphael,

concealed more than art. To call him a traitorous collaborator underrates his subtlety and simplifies his practice.... The fact that posterity has read with some ease between Josephus's lines is more of a credit to his artfulness than scholarly detectives are in the habit of conceding.

Josephus could easily have elided the truth of his actions in the suicide cave at Jotapata, but he didn't. He was also honest enough to reveal that his mother never forgave him for going over to the Romans.

Raphael's penchant for the relevance-straining footnote is the least attractive trait of this otherwise erudite book. At various points, Dorothy Parker and Norodom Sihanouk take puzzling footnote bows, and later we find a brief explication of Arnold Schwarzenegger's feminizing (and, Raphael argues, slyly anti-Semitic) use of the phrase "girlie

men." Very occasionally, the book slips factually, as when Raphael notes that Jerusalem's Antonia Tower was named after the wife of Claudius. (It was named after Herod's former patron Marc Antony.) He also claims that Nabokov's antipathy for Freud was "more naughty than malicious." But Nabokov despised Freud, and said as much, frequently. Still, when Raphael imagines Josephus walking "among bruising reminders and relics of Jewish humiliation" in Rome—the Colosseum, funded by loot plundered from Judea, and the Arch of Titus, which commemorates the sack of the Second Temple—his subject, to say nothing of his subject's quandary, feels newly strange and complicated.

Detroit has been a steadily disintegrating disaster for decades, going from one of the nation's proudest and wealthiest cities to a violent and increasingly depopulated symbol of America's twenty-first-century decline. With its nonexistent social services, culture of murder, and Herodian levels of civic corruption, Detroit is the domestic equivalent of a failed state—the only city in the nation to have been occupied three times by the United States Army.

DETROIT: AN AMERICAN AUTOPSY (Penguin Press, \$27.95, penguin.com) chronicles the journalist Charlie LeDuff's return to his native city after a decade at the *New York Times*. There are many I'm-from-Detroit pretenders out there from Grosse Pointe or Birmingham or Bloomfield Hills. LeDuff is not one of these. His drug-addict and sometimes-prostitute sister died in an encounter with a john; his recession-felled brother works a tedious factory job; his niece died of a heroin overdose.

"Go ahead and laugh at Detroit," he writes early in the book. "Because you are laughing at yourself." It seems that LeDuff's *Times* editor

called the farmers and hunters and drive-

through attendants and factory workers I wrote about losers. Say the word slowly enough and it sounds like you're spitting.

It does? Not remotely. Either way, LeDuff quit. As a Michigander myself, I dislike snooty *Times* editors as much as anyone, but the best way to flummox unexamined assumptions is to do the hard, diligent work of humanizing those parts of the country parochial nitwits find distasteful. For years—in *US Guys and Work and Other Sins*—LeDuff did just that.

Throughout *Detroit*, though, he repeatedly picks fights with his *Times* editor and all the people he or she supposedly typifies. While this gives his prose a ranting intensity, too often the book feels petty and self-aggrandizing. About taking a job at the comparatively lowly *Detroit News*, LeDuff writes, "I'd build a castle of words so high on the banks of the Detroit River that they couldn't help but see it from Times Square." Equally off-putting is his reductive view of journalists and journalism: "I am a reporter. A leech. A merchant of misery. Bad things are good for us reporters. We are body collectors of sorts." Later, LeDuff tells us that he enjoys spending time around firefighters because they make him "feel a little bit better about being a guy who makes his living typing up clever things other people say." No one who worked his way up from a small Alaskan newspaper to writing for the *Times*, winning a Pulitzer, and publishing several books, as LeDuff has done, can make such



Detroit firefighters © Ian Willms/Reportage by Getty Images Emerging Talent

claims honestly. No one works that hard for a trade he holds in contempt.

Nevertheless, LeDuff's account of his time with Detroit's underfunded and heroic firefighters—which forms the book's spine—is excellent journalism. His depiction of the violence visited on Detroit's children—many of their families too poor to afford proper burials—will enrage the conscience of all but the most hardened. And his portraits of Detroit's politicians—a white industrialist elite that manipulates a black ruling class, both of them having conspired over the past fifty years to rob the poorest big city in the country blind—are almost as good as anything in Richard Price or *The Wire*. From former Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick (a preening, thieving mama's boy with a penchant for sexting) to Congressman John Conyers's nightmare wife, Monica (once captured on camera yelling at a thirteen-year-old girl for asking her why she was so bananas), LeDuff hilariously and angrily exposes his subjects' cupidity. (When LeDuff meets with Monica Conyers, she gropes his crotch, looking for a wire.)

LeDuff's book puts a personal face on a great city doomed to suffer too long for the actions of too few. Along the way, he discovers an unexpected branch within his family tree and, in the pages of the *Detroit News*, breaks open several scandals, including one that helps expose an arsonist responsible for the death of a firefighter. Unfortunately, LeDuff's troublemaking investigative skills place in his crosshairs a lazy judge known as "Half-Day Hathaway" because of her tendency to adjourn cases early so she can go on vacation. LeDuff's editors defang his story, which leads to a predictable judicial travesty. Once again, LeDuff has had enough:

I called my buddy the janitor and had him bring a trash can on wheels up to the newsroom. When he did, I swept the entire contents of my desktop into the garbage and walked out.

He is now a television journalist for Detroit's Fox 2 News and no doubt a cheery and helpful colleague to all.

The list of writers celebrated exclusively or primarily for their short stories is not long: Chekhov, Kafka, Borges, Barthelme,

Munro, and, more recently, George Saunders. It remains unclear why exactly Saunders is beloved by so many readers, including this one. His memorandum prose has no Nabokovian splendor. His ideas about the corporatist future of America range from obvious to very obvious. His sense of humor is frequently juvenile, as when he resorts to such phrases as "cunt-swoggle rear-fuck." Is Saunders primarily a satirist, like Twain, or an excavator of his culture's shameful secret conscience, like Kafka? Neither, or both: "Saunders" has become a major key, a way to describe not just tone or theme or characterological tendency but all of those things and more. His new collection, *TENTH OF DECEMBER* (Random House, \$26, randomhouse.com), is easily his finest book since *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*.

A number of stories in the collection ("Victory Lap," "Escape from Spiderhead," the title story) would stand as career-summitting masterpieces for most short-story writers—and they are not even the best in the collection. That honor goes to "The Semplica Girl Diaries," a tale about a diary-keeping father who wins \$10,000 in the lottery and uses the money to buy his daughter magically imprisoned Third World nymphets. Money, the father learns, buys no one happiness, least of all him: "Can it be true? That I will die? That Pam, kids, will die? Is awful. Why were we put here, so inclined to love, when end of our story = death? That harsh. That cruel. Do not like." The Saunders secret appears to be beginning with the hide-bound conventions of more traditionally sleepy literary fiction and injecting 50 ccs of absurdist sci-fi. Saunders's obvious contempt for consumer culture, which is present in virtually every one of his stories, somehow never alters his obvious affection for his characters. He writes funny, hopeful stories about truly horrifying predicaments.

Nothing has been read its last rites more frequently than the American short story. George Saunders proves, yet again, to be the form's one-man defibrillator. ■

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A Live Paris Review
Writers-At-Work Interview
with Darryl Pinckney

MARCH

- 14 Thu** A. B. Yehoshua
- 15 Thu** Aleksandar Hemon and
Wenguang Huang

APRIL

- 14 Thu** Will Eno and Amy Herzog
- 15 Mon** Poetry at 100 with Frank Bidart,
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RED STATES

The Soviet attempt to export communism

By Michael Scammell

Discussed in this essay:

Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944–1956, by Anne Applebaum.
Doubleday. 608 pages. \$35. knopfdoubleday.com.



One of the twentieth century's most significant innovations was the concept of world war, and it managed to stage not one but two, as if the first weren't good enough and had to be perfected. Figures for the death toll in these wars vary widely, but whereas World War I ("the war to end all wars") notched up something like 20 million deaths, World War II ("the greatest man-made disaster in history," according to Antony Beevor in his new book, *The Second World War*) did much better, with 60–70 million deaths. After this Armageddon, Europeans longed for a permanent peace and a chance

Michael Scammell is the author of *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* and *Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic*.

to recuperate; Western Europe for the most part got both. The eastern half of the continent, however, was forcibly separated from the western half by the forces of the Red Army, who arrived as liberators and stayed as occupiers. Cut off by a military shield that came to be known as the Iron Curtain, Eastern Europe was subjected to a raft of both violent and peaceful operations designed to transform the countries of the region into model communist states. This war by other means led to another twentieth-century innovation, the Cold War, and is the subject of Anne Applebaum's impressive new book, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944–1956*.

Was the eastern half of Europe "sacrificed to the Stalinist maw to save the

other half," as Beevor puts it? Western leaders claimed surprise at Soviet tactics, but they knew much more about the impending changes than they were prepared to reveal. At the Tehran and Yalta conferences of the "Big Three" held in 1943 and 1945 to plan a postwar settlement, Britain and the United States had colluded in this division of the continent. True, Roosevelt and Churchill had extracted from Stalin promises for democratic elections, but Stalin's idea of democracy was managed

democracy, and the results of his planned elections would be determined in advance. The ailing Roosevelt may not have fully realized the implications of the settlement, preoccupied as he was with the continuing war in Asia and with getting the United Nations off the ground. Churchill (who coined the term "Iron Curtain") certainly did realize—and regret—what was happening, but, all too aware of British and French weakness after the war, he accepted that there was little the West could do short of fighting another war.

The enormity of this sudden loss of half a continent was overlooked at

the time by the Western public, whose capacity for horror had been consumed by the newly discovered atrocities of the Holocaust and the scorched-earth policies of the war. The idea that so recent an ally in the struggle to overcome the evil of fascism could so quickly turn into an aggressor and enemy was hard to grasp—especially in Europe, where there was popular disgust with the appeasement policies of prewar governments and, shaped by the rise of the left, widespread sympathy for such progressive ideals as class equality, the creation of a welfare state, and nationalization of the economy. The British Labour Party had won power in 1945; the French Communist Party was the strongest political force in that country.

Meanwhile, Soviet forces lost little time importing key elements of the

Soviet system into each of the eight nations they occupied, many of which fiercely resisted the new order. Local communist parties backed by Moscow regularly lost elections in the first two years after the war, and though there were violent revolts well into the 1950s, the Soviets and their collaborators eventually prevailed by force of arms. Hannah Arendt, one of the foremost theorists of totalitarianism, remarked that "it was as though the Russian rulers repeated in great haste all the stages of the October Revolution up to the emergence of totalitarian dictatorship." She concluded that the story of the Eastern European countries, "while unspeakably terrible, is without much interest of its own and varies very little."

Applebaum's book serves as a warning against such oversimplification. It reminds us that the countries of the region had vastly different cultures, political traditions, and economic structures before the war, and that despite the homogenizing pressures of the occupation, their experiences of communism were very different. At the same time, Applebaum acknowledges the need for some sort of synthesis; her solution is to focus her story on three of the eight countries occupied by the Soviet Union—East Germany, Poland, and Hungary—and let them stand in for the whole. Having drawn from the secret-police and government archives of all three countries, she brings clarity and color to her historical analysis by quoting liberally from the many diaries and memoirs she consulted, as well as from personal interviews.

The first chapter, "Zero Hour," for example, starts with eyewitness accounts of the first days after the war. In Budapest:

The mad orgy of ruins, entangled wires, twisted corpses, dead horses, overturned parts of blown-up bridges, bloody hoofs which had been torn off horses, broken guns, scattered ammunition, chamber pots.

In Warsaw:

It seemed to me that I was walking on corpses, that at any moment I would step into a pool of blood.

In Berlin:

The Russians have the streets entirely to themselves. But under every building people are whispering, quaking. Who could ever imagine such a world, hidden here, so frightened, right in the middle of the big city?

The scale of the destruction visited on Eastern Europe during and after the war was far greater than anything seen in the western part of the continent. Poland alone lost 5.5 million people—including 3 million Jews—amounting to 20 percent of its population; 30 million Europeans were transplanted or deported between 1939 and 1943, another 20 million by 1948. A region so thoroughly plowed and harrowed seemed to offer fertile ground for the planting of a new kind of society, perhaps even of a new kind of civilization. Capitalism and liberal democracy had failed in the 1930s, especially in Eastern Europe, and many people believed it was time to try something different. Most communist leaders in the region, writes Applebaum, "really did think that sooner or later the working-class majority would acquire class consciousness, understand its historical destiny, and vote for a communist regime." But there were problems from the start. The Russian soldiers, greeted joyously when they arrived, soon started to inspire fear and hatred as they indulged in looting and theft.

Liquor and ladies' lingerie, furniture and crockery, bicycles and linen were taken from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic and the Balkan states as well as Germany. Wristwatches seemed to have almost mythical significance for Russian soldiers, who would walk around wearing half a dozen at once if they could.

The situation got even grimmer when the soldiers took to murdering civilians and raping women—by the millions, according to later consensus. Nothing illustrates the brutality of these rapes more vividly than an early poem by Solzhenitsyn about what he saw in East Prussia as a lieutenant in the Red Army:

A moaning by the walls, half muffled:
The mother's wounded, still alive.
The little daughter's on the mattress,
Dead. How many have been on it,
A platoon, a company perhaps?
A girl's been turned into a woman,
A woman into a corpse.

Applebaum rightly dismisses revisionist theories that blame the "aggressive rhetoric" of Cold Warriors for provoking the Soviet Union and argue that the Cold War was "caused not by communist expansion but by the American drive for open international markets." She is equally dismissive of the idea that the division of Germany resulted from the failure of the Western powers to "take advantage of Stalin's peaceful overtures." And she stoutly defends the idea that Soviet and Eastern European societies were "totalitarian": these were societies in which, as Mussolini once said of Italy, everything would be "within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state."

Many of these revisionist arguments were the fruit of opposition to Senator Joseph McCarthy's brand of strident anticommunism and an attendant distaste for the House Un-American Activities Committee. Though still current, they hardly stand up to the facts. The Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe, for example, began not with the end of World War II but well before, in 1939, after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, when Hitler's forces occupied western Poland and the Red Army occupied eastern Poland, eastern Finland, the Baltic states, and what is now Moldova. The Soviet authorities immediately set about undermining local power structures; arresting and deporting Polish politicians, businessmen, civil servants, and clergy; and slaughtering more than 20,000 Polish military officers and members of the intelligentsia near Katyn. It was only when Hitler abandoned the pact, invaded the Soviet Union, and sent his armies to the very outskirts of Leningrad that this first experiment in exporting communism was interrupted. By then the

Soviet secret police and their local collaborators had gained valuable experience in killing or expelling those who resisted their rule, and they returned with the Red Army after the retreating Germans were pushed out.

Once the secret police were re-entrenched, they resumed their policy of selective arrests and assassinations, the takeover of the mass media, the subversion of political parties, and the remaking of the economy. As for the promised democratic elections, they were held according to the principles laid out by the East German leader Walter Ulbricht in 1946. "We will organize them," he said, "in such a manner as to ensure that there is a working-class majority in all towns and villages." In fact, the first round of elections was a disappointment for communist parties throughout the region, and it took a few years to realize Ulbricht's plan.

The fate of the Polish politician Stanisław Mikołajczyk illustrates the way that plan was carried out. Mikołajczyk had been the leader of the Polish government-in-exile in London during World War II, had negotiated directly with Churchill and Stalin, and had stubbornly opposed their decision to move Poland's borders ("We'll become sick and tired of you if you continue arguing!" shouted Churchill at one point during the talks). After the war ended, Mikołajczyk was too important to be prevented from returning to Poland, and once there he conducted his political campaigns with a tenacity that made his Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) immensely popular with the electorate. He fought for, among other things, the very right to establish a political opposition, to which the communists responded with arrests, police violence, torture, and the murder of some of his allies. Though the PSL looked poised to win the 1947 parliamentary elections, the communists tampered so brazenly with the results that the falsification was obvious to everyone, and Mikołajczyk was forced to flee back to England to save his life.

One of the grimmest aspects of the Soviet occupation was the policy of "ethnic cleansing" (a term that fits the process, though it was not in use at the time). The Potsdam Agreement, signed in July 1945 by Truman and Attlee as well as by Stalin, had called for the "transfer to Germany of German populations" living in Eastern Europe and for Poland's borders to be moved more than a hundred miles to the west, which meant the additional transfer of millions of Ukrainians from Poland to Soviet Ukraine. Similar adjustments of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian borders forced thousands of Hungarians and Slovaks to move between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Hitler, of course, had set the precedent for such huge population shifts not only with his slaughter of the Jews but also by ordering Nazi troopers to kill or deport hundreds of thousands of Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians and replace them with German colonists. When the Nazi armies were defeated, close to 12 million Germans (including both newly arrived colonists and families who had lived there for centuries) were uprooted and driven from their homes.

During the "full-blown ethnic war" that erupted, the Poles launched Operation Vistula, an effort to rid Poland of its ethnic Ukrainians once and for all. It led to scenes like the one a Ukrainian man told Applebaum he had witnessed as a child. In his account, Polish soldiers surround a house where a wedding ceremony is being held and set it on fire.

They killed the groom and several guests who couldn't escape; they threw the bloodied corpses onto a cart. . . . When they were about to leave, the bride suddenly appeared, in a white dress, with a veil. She begged for them to leave the body of her husband, Ivan. The soldiers laughed, tied her hands together with rope, tied her to the wagon and set off. The girl first ran, then fell, and was dragged through the dirt. The soldiers shot at her, and finally cut the rope and left her dead in the road.

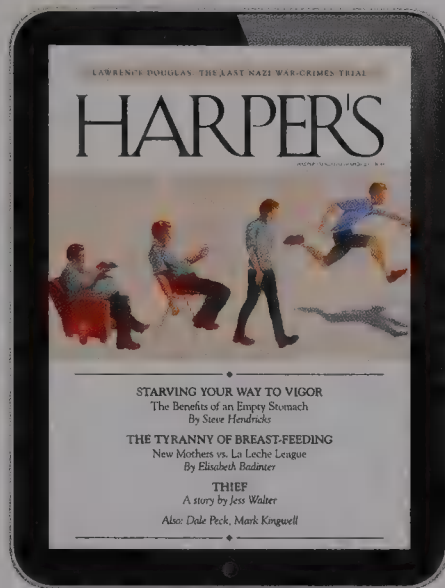
After the first few years of the occupation, once communist forms of government had been imposed on the region by force, Eastern Europe entered a period of what Applebaum calls "High Stalinism." The "socialist paradise," she writes, "was still far away"—as was true of communist societies everywhere (not least in the Soviet Union). This paradise could be attained only after the pesky problems of the present—including remnants of the bourgeoisie, religious believers, freewheeling artists and writers, obstinate workers, reluctant collaborators, passive opponents, even recalcitrant children—had been either eliminated or persuaded to conform. The ultimate goal of the Soviet-installed leaders was to create millions of citizens in the mold of *Homo sovieticus*, "an entirely new type of human being," and they would begin with the children, who were thought to be "blank slates or lumps of clay." Applebaum writes that, according to the Soviet educational theorist Anton Makarenko, a particular favorite of Stalin's, "any child, however unpromising his background and however reactionary his parents, could be transformed into a good Soviet citizen." Adults, meanwhile, had to be trained (or retrained) in "socialist humanism," and proletarians and peasants would take precedence over urban intellectuals and professionals. Artists, the "engineers of human souls" in Stalin's unforgettable definition, were expected to adhere to the fuzzy doctrine of socialist realism, which demanded the "truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development" and also required "the ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism." Eastern Europe soon became littered with specimens of Soviet wedding-cake architecture—think of Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science, described as a "gift from Stalin"—as well as pompous statues of political leaders and muscled workers.

These educational theories and artistic doctrines were of course

barely disguised instruments of political power, designed to break down traditional values and establish new ones in their place. But perhaps the most ambitious of these utopian Soviet endeavors was the attempt to create “ideal cities,” steel-producing towns built from scratch: Nowa Huta in Poland, Sztálinváros in Hungary, and Stalinstadt in East Germany. Their enormous mills were intended to accelerate industrialization, to “draw the peasantry into factories and thus enlarge the working class” while also proving that “central planning could produce more rapid economic growth than capitalism.” Literary works were commissioned to glorify the process. “O my steel mill! Mother of the countless masses/ Who work together for your glory/ You strengthen my heart/ I grew up on your soil,” wrote one aspiring poet. But the new cities proved to be hellish environments, with poor wages, primitive living conditions, and nowhere to go at night or during weekends and holidays. Another poet, Adam Wazyk, recognized the marooned workers of these cities for what they were: a “huge mob, pushed suddenly/ Out of medieval darkness: an inhuman Poland,/ Howling with boredom on December nights ...”

The promises of High Stalinism proved chimerical, and after Stalin’s death in March 1953, the populations of East Germany, Poland, and Hungary gave their response. A workers’ strike in East Germany quickly escalated into a full-fledged revolt that had to be suppressed by Soviet tanks. Three years after that, in the wake of Khrushchev’s secret speech denouncing Stalin, a workers’ uprising occurred in Poland and was put down by soldiers and tanks; and in the same year, a popular revolution that toppled the communist government in Hungary was ended by another large-scale invasion by Soviet troops. Applebaum ends her story here, noting that these violent rebellions signaled the utter failure of the Soviet attempt to convert Eastern Europe to communism, and that they put an

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SOLUTION TO THE JANUARY PUZZLE

NOTES FOR “HAPPY NEW
YEAR”:

Puzzle editing by Dan Asimov.
Note: * indicates an anagram.

The unclued entry at 13D needing no further definition is THIRTEEN. The other unclued entries are well-known thirteens: COLONIES, GHOSTS, DAYS, UNLUCKY NUMBER, CLOCKS, MOONS, CHANNEL, PALMS, and OCEAN'S.

C	O	L	O	N	I	E	S	C	H	A	M	P
H	O	A	R	Y	A	S	P	H	Y	X	I	A
U	T	R	I	E	N	N	I	A	P	U	L	L
G	H	O	S	T	S	E	N	N	E	A	D	M
S	I	M	O	O	M	S	E	N	D	A	Y	S
P	R	I	N	C	I	P	L	E	S	N	E	H
O	T	T	S	A	L	L	E	L	U	I	A	U
T	E	S	T	P	E	R	S	I	M	M	O	N
L	E	V	Y	I	L	L	S	M	P	A	C	T
U	N	L	U	C	K	Y	N	U	M	B	E	R
C	L	O	C	K	S	N	E	M	U	S	A	E
K	A	S	C	E	N	D	S	M	O	O	N	S
S	T	E	A	D	F	A	S	T	N	E	S	S

ACROSS: 7. two mngs.; 11. pun; 12. *; 13. trien(n)ia*; 14. pull(et); 18. *; 19. S.(I'[moo]m)S.; 25. rev.; 27. A.(lleiui*)A.; 28. te(nth)-st(reet); 29. p-ersimmon*; 31. homophone; 33. (w)ills; 36. PAC-t; 41. hidden in reverse; 42. a(S.C.E.)nd-s; 44. st-eadfastness*.

DOWN: 1. c-hugs; 2. lar(d); 3. o(p)rions; 4. N(y)ET; 5. *; 6. pun; 8. h(abituall)y-ped; 9. mild(ew); 16. *; 17. hidden; 21. a(min[rev.]a); 22. yea(r); 23. pot-luck-s; 24. sum-p; 26. Hun-(s)tress; 29. pick(£)ed; 32. homophone; 34. hidden; 35. homophone; 38. hidden; 39. mu(t-t)on.

end to what might be termed the “idealistic phase” of the occupation. The puppet regimes maintained thereafter by Soviet arms limped on for another three decades, with varying degrees of success, but were never truly viable or independent. As Applebaum writes:

They lurched from crisis to crisis, not because they were unable to fine-tune their policies but because the communist project itself was flawed. By trying to control every aspect of society, the regimes had turned every aspect of society into a potential form of protest.

Applebaum, a journalist by training, has a fine sense of history and is a vivid writer, indefatigable in chasing down sources and mining archives, scrupulous in acknowledging the work of other scholars, and ever astute in pinpointing the motives of her subjects. Unfortunately, the first half of the book, “False Dawn,” which describes the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe, is so dense with facts, figures, and dates that it becomes airless and hard to follow; fortunately, part two, “High Stalinism,” is more discursive and animated. In her epilogue, Applebaum concludes that

[I]f enough people are sufficiently determined, and if they are backed by adequate resources and force, then they can destroy ancient and apparently permanent legal, political, educational, and religious institutions, sometimes for good.

True, but when the Soviet empire finally collapsed, its demise was provoked and hastened by rebellions in Eastern Europe. With hindsight, Applebaum’s book can be read as a cautionary tale: by imposing its system of government on Eastern Europe through cruel and violent means, the Soviet Union sowed the seeds of its own downfall. But the conclusive failure of the Soviet experiment, no matter how satisfying to contemplate in the abstract, is scant comfort when compared with the huge losses of life, freedom, and security suffered by untold millions of the innocent—and the not so innocent—beforehand. ■

MADAME AND THE MASTERS

Blavatsky’s cosmic soap opera

By John Crowley

Discussed in this essay:

Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality, by Gary Lachman.
Tarcher/Penguin. 352 pages. \$16.95. penguin.com.



Last things first: How did the avocado come to its present prominence in the agriculture of California? It happened just about a hundred years ago and belongs to the history of the syncretic occult system called “theosophy” and the life of its creator, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Madame Blavatsky, or HPB, as she preferred to call herself, passed from the earthly plane

John Crowley is the author of a dozen novels and some volumes of short fiction. He is a three-time winner of the World Fantasy Award and the recipient of an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

in 1891; her death caused upheaval in the Theosophical Society she created, dividing the loyalties of its many Orders, Sections, and Lodges among several successors. Katherine Tingley, a strong-willed woman of the type important to the spread of organized theosophy, renamed her American partition of HPB’s empire the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society and established its headquarters at Point Loma, California, in San Diego. With donations from wealthy devotees she created Lomaland, a spread of farms and orchards that

also featured schools, theaters, and temples in a mélange of styles—Hindu, Muslim, Greek, Egyptian. The Purple Mother, as Tingley chose to be called, had a great fondness for ritual and regalia, but she was also a successful educational and agricultural entrepreneur, installing an innovative irrigation system on her grounds and undertaking the first large-scale cultivation of avocados in California.

What was once Lomaland is today the Point Loma Nazarene University. HPB ignored Christianity when she didn’t despise it, but she appreciated cosmic jokes.



The second half of the nineteenth century—the period when natural science came to maturity, setting standards for practice and verification that are still followed—also saw a renewal of spiritual enthusiasms and systems. There was widespread interest in spiritualism, which posited that the dead persist in a realm of their own from which they can transmit messages through mediums to tell us of their present and our future states. The newfound prestige of science perhaps encouraged the creators of some of these spiritualistic systems to claim the name for themselves (one thinks of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science); others explicitly rejected scientific naturalism in favor of the transcendental. Some turned both ways: there were, and still are, both spiritualist churches and a Society for Psychical Research; Arthur Conan Doyle and William James were among the committed rationalists intrigued by spiritualism; even Charles Darwin attended a séance.

This was Blavatsky's era. Gary Lachman, in his new biography, calls her the mother of modern spirituality, though a less mothering personality can hardly be imagined. She considered revelation—her kind was brought on by hidden "Masters"—a spiritual science, and her followers assembled from the re-

sulting cloth more than one religion, not only the Purple Mother's but that of the late Elizabeth Clare Prophet, whose mesmeric gaze could once be found on *Larry King Live* and *Donahue*. In HPB's own lifetime her magnetism drew tens of thousands; hardheaded Thomas Edison was a follower, as was the former Dakota newspaperman L. Frank Baum. Abner Doubleday, Union general and mythical inventor of baseball, for a time directed the Theosophical Society's American branch. Occultists of today who ponder Atlantis and the number of the pyramids or speculate on the wisdom of lost races and the passage of world ages are indeed her children, even if they've forgotten her name. Lachman doesn't overstate by much when he calls the founding of the Theosophical Society the "starting point of the modern spiritual revival" and writes that "practically all modern occultism and esotericism emerged from [HPB's] ample bosom."

A Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductee and the former bassist for Blondie, Lachman has written about other esoteric figures, including Emanuel Swedenborg, the Scandinavian mystic whose accounts of his talks with angels and visits to heaven and hell influenced Emerson, Henry James Sr., and other progenitors of a

distinctive American Christianity. Lachman's telling of the Blavatsky story is somehow at once extravagant and deadpan. His favorite word is "mysterious," which he applies generously to persons, things, events, and places, deploying it sometimes twice or even three times on a page to mean variously "unrevealed," "unaccounted for," "secretive," "deep," "far-off," "out of the ordinary," "possibly nonexistent or illusory," "wondrous," "obscure"—everything, indeed, *but* mysterious. Though Helena Petrovna and what she was within must remain irreducibly mysterious, the story of HPB and theosophy as Lachman tells it often seems the opposite.

There are people whose life stories resemble novels, replete with adventures, wild coincidences, struggles, and happy (or tragic) endings. Then there are people whose life stories *are* novels, at least effectually: to read accounts of their lives requires suspension of disbelief and the sense of something unfolding that is imagined and constructed rather than discovered, something to which documentary sourcing, the establishing of facts and timelines, and the sifting of truth from imposture or myth are irrelevant or impossible. The life of HPB as she presented it and as her followers witnessed it is certainly one of these. It would be as pointless to complain that Madame Blavatsky's

Paintings from *Thought-forms*, 1905, by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, representing the colors and shapes believed by the authors to emanate from the body during thought. Left, top and bottom: *Radiating Affection* and *Jealousy*. Center, top and bottom: *Two Gamblers—Successful, Unsuccessful*. Right, top and bottom: *Vague Intellectual Pleasure* and *Selfish Ambition* © Mary Evans Picture Library

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life tale is in large part dubious, unsupported, *untrue*, as it would be to say that Madame Bovary's is.

HPB's tale begins when she encounters the first of the Secret Masters who will be her lifetime spiritual guides. Born in 1831 the daughter of a Russianized German army officer and an aristocratic writer, Helena Petrovna is nearly eleven years old when her mother dies; she's brought to Saratov on the Volga to live with her grandparents in their old mansion, a rambling pile full of underground tunnels and hidden passages where a lonely girl can hide from her nurses and tutors. Headstrong, generous, bold, she prefers the servants' children and the street kids to her upper-class peers and rules them with stories about the conscious lives of pebbles and stones and with her weird ability to put pigeons to sleep with "Solomon's wisdom." (This term puzzles Lachman, but surely it derives from the ring that allowed King Solomon to talk to the birds and the beasts.) She visits an old serf, a healer and holy man, who knows the hidden properties of plants and teaches her the language of the bees. At night she dreams of a Protector. Thinking he must have some family connection, she searches for his face among the old portraits on the walls. One portrait, high up, is covered with a curtain—no one will tell her who it is. Helena makes a pile of furniture, climbs up, and pulls back the curtain ... then she tumbles down in shock. The next thing she remembers is lying on the floor, all the furniture restored to where it was, the face again covered. A dream? But her handprint is there, high up on the dusty wall.

Who has she seen? In 1851 she encounters him in person, in London, where (in one of her many differing accounts) he saves her from jumping in a fit of depression into the Thames. He is Master Morya. He has sought her out for a tremendous mission. In preparation for it she must spend three years in Tibet. Heading for Asia along Columbus's route, she goes west rather than east, an extraordinary multiyear journey that involves Mormons in Nauvoo, voodoo in New Orleans (where she is

warned away from the Dark Arts), Indian bandits in Quebec, and lost Incan temples. She crosses the Pacific to India. After two years, she returns to Europe by way of Russia, fighting in Garibaldi's army at the Battle of Mentana in 1867 (she has the scars to prove it), and then, directed by a letter from her Master, to Constantinople and back to India, at length reaching Tibet. She—a lone European woman—breaches the borders of a land closed to Westerners, passes as a (male) native, and spends not three but seven years in study and meditation at various mountain lamaseries.

The dates HPB later gave for these *Wanderjahre* are not impossibly contradictory, but as Lachman says, even if all she really did was travel to Tibet, that alone would make her one of the wonders of the nineteenth century. Could she have done it? She could ride a horse well, Lachman points out, and "is thought to have learned enough Tibetan from the Tartar nomads" she met at her grandparents' estate to have at least bought supplies and asked directions. Still in her thirties, she was likely not the overweight and unwell person she would in later years become. Lachman is willing to entertain doubts about this and other HPB adventures, but often such doubts are quickly left behind. Many of the accounts he relies on for HPB's early life are seen later to be the work not of scholars and researchers but of converts and associates, their evidence coming largely from HPB herself.

The aspiring adept who undertakes dangerous journeys and risks death to learn the secrets of an ancient land is a common, if not necessary, figure in the founding stories of occult societies. For centuries that land was Egypt. Greek seekers of late antiquity went there to sleep in the deserted temples and receive instructive dreams; the medieval Rosicrucians and early-modern Hermetic initiates claimed to have learned wisdom there. Egypt retained (and still retains) its mystery for many; but with the advent of steamship travel and modern tourism, a less accessible realm was needed, a realm where anything could happen. As theosophy evolved, it took in Greek, Jew-

ish, Egyptian, and Sufi sources; but the wellspring was Tibet—a Tibet that perhaps few Tibetans now or then would recognize.

The years HPB spent off and on in India are well documented. As her Theosophical Society grew large and rich over the years, it established international headquarters in Madras, where they still reside. Espousing the Brotherhood of Man and rejecting British racism, the society was warmly received by the many faiths of India, at least at first (it was British theosophists who introduced a non-religious young barrister named Mohandas Gandhi to the Bhagavad Gita—which he read first in English translation). HPB gleaned from secondary sources a wide if idiosyncratic knowledge of Hindu scriptures and Buddhist traditions, and though Indian critics would sometimes dismiss her theosophical Buddhism as corrupt or fake, such harping never had much effect on her; her goal was not the promotion of a creed but the discovery and explication of a universal spiritual reality underlying or overlying all religions and all soul-strivings. Though HPB insisted on celibacy—and seems to have had no interest in sex—theosophy was not a practice or a devotion, certainly not an asceticism. It sought neither purity nor sinlessness nor even redemption but *knowledge*, what she called “Science.” Like gnosticism, theosophy was a means of ascendance, through knowledge of a secret history of the universe, to the condition of Master-ship, a height that even HPB never claimed to have reached.

She was, though, aided by many Masters over time: the Greek Hilarion Smerdis, the Egyptian Tuitit Bey, the French count St.-Germain, and (most communicative of all) Master Morya’s assistant or secretary, the Tibetan Koot Hoomi. They were all living beings, said HPB, though they lived impossibly long lives; they could travel without train ticket or passport and communicate across continents. She met some “in the body” who later appeared in dreams or on the astral plane (a term she popularized) to certain of her associates. These personages, at once immaterial and colorful—you might call them “fic-

tional” if the term could be used without prejudice—differentiate HPB’s theosophical mythos from the many competing or allied systems of spiritual investigation that arose in her time.

The most prominent of these was spiritualism, which like theosophy presented itself as both an investigative science and an experiential gnosis. HPB wittily reframed popular spiritualist practice, with its table rapping and ectoplasm: she asserted that the souls of the dead are concerned with their own evolution to higher planes, and that they have no interest in communicating about it to the living; mediums were actually channeling minor sprites who wandered on “the borderland between the living and the dead”—a “species of astral hobo,” as Lachman neatly characterizes them, or “elementals,” as HPB called them, earthy products of the four elements. Mediums were weak, porous souls unable to fend off these imps, who had enough power to produce poltergeist-like “phenomena” and mimic the voices that séance attendees wanted to hear; when the elementals hied off, mediums under pressure just improvised, or they faked. Spiritualism was thus not false so much as misapprehended; it was bad spiritual science.

By this light, the many ghost visitors summoned by members of the Eddy family to Chittenden, Vermont, throughout 1874—including a jug band of American Indians who played popular tunes and an old Vermonter who told vulgar stories—were not what they seemed, even if they weren’t an imposture. When a Colonel Olcott began reporting the Eddys’ doings not unfavorably in the New York *Daily Graphic*, the articles caught HPB’s attention. In a media move that our own century can appreciate, she went up to Chittenden, attracted the colonel’s interest to herself, showed him how the phenomena the Eddy boys produced could easily be duplicated, and at the height of the furor got articles about herself in Olcott’s paper.

Her name was made. The famed spiritualist medium Daniel Dunglas Home accused the newcomer herself of fakery, and she engaged him with such energy and sass that Colonel

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Olcott, endlessly thirsty for occult knowledge, became her devotee, companion (though never lover), promoter, and business partner—services that lasted nearly to the end of their lives. They called themselves the Chums, and Olcott the journalist is surely responsible in part for the clarity and verve of HPB's early writings. Together they formed the infant Theosophical Society, which met in New York City lodgings dubbed the Lamasery. She wowed a growing crowd with lectures, demonstrations of telepathy, "mesmeric hallucinations" (including a ring that she gave to a fan), and the tinkling of astral bells. And there, ceaselessly smoking her hand-rolled cigarettes, she wrote her first explication of the Masters' teachings, *Isis Unveiled*.

Enormously long (though not as long as her later work *The Secret Doctrine*), *Isis Unveiled* is more like a medieval compendium of wonder tales than an organized philosophy, with section titles such as "Prophecy of Nostradamus fulfilled," "The moon and the tides," "The gods of the Pantheons only natural forces," "The 'four truths' of Buddhism," "Vulnerability of certain 'shadows,'" and "The author witnesses a trial of magic in India." It touches on Indian tape climbing, the limits of suspended animation, and vampirism. The introduction, "Before the Veil," resembles a great and multifarious army rolling into place or a symphony of the period getting under way:

It is nineteen centuries since, as we are told, the night of Heathenism and Paganism was first dispelled by the divine light of Christianity; and two-and-a-half centuries since the bright lamp of Modern Science began to shine on the darkness of the ignorance of the ages. Within these respective epochs, we are required to believe, the true moral and intellectual progress of the race has occurred ... This is the assumption; what are the facts? On the one hand an unspiritual, dogmatic, too often debauched clergy; a host of sects, and three warring great religions; discord instead of union, dogmas without proofs ... pleasure-seeking parishioners' hypocrisy and bigotry ... On the other hand, scientific hypotheses built on sand; no accord upon a single

question ... a general drift into materialism. A death-grapple of Science with Theology for infallibility—a "conflict of ages."

"Whither, then, should we turn," she asks, "but to the ancient sages"? Sure enough, they and their doctrines begin to appear in HPB's teachings, voices of the universal occult sciences of the soul from Plato and Porphyry to Pythagoras and the Vedas.

The interest aroused by theosophy and its founder grew. For a time, the names of Madame Blavatsky and Koot Hoomi were frequently in the news—these were the early days of the penny press and the tabloid screamer—and accounts of HPB's phenomena, her new gospel, her rooms crammed with weird artifacts (including a stuffed baboon dressed in a wing collar and eyeglasses and carrying a lecture about *On the Origin of Species*), her rotundity and voluminous costumes ("like a badly wrapped and glittering parcel," said an earlier biographer), were on many a breakfast table. (It's unfortunate that there seem to be no pictures of her in youth; the photographs we have show her as a commonplace, not to say ugly, old lady.)

The society grew not only large but also rich. It's inadvisable to accept the figures for numbers of converts and members that such organizations put out, but the Theosophical Society was run on a subscription basis, and subscription lists survive showing thousands of paid members around the world. Even those who later broke with Madame Blavatsky, as did Rudolph Steiner, depended for a time on her revelations. W. B. Yeats admired her force and vigor, which contrasted with the spiritualist's typical vagueness, but rather doubted her Masters: Yeats thought they *could* be living occultists, or spirits, but they could also be "unconscious dramatizations of HPB's own trance nature" or even "the trance principle of nature expressing itself symbolically." Peter Washington, in his acerb and wonderfully written history of modern esotericism, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon* (1993), wonders whether Yeats's readers will find his explanations "any less mystifying than Blavatsky's own," but I find very modern his conception of HPB's mysteries

as neither exactly what she claimed them to be nor simple fakery. "The trance principle of nature" might be a good name for the apparently hard-wired human impulse to make and become enthralled in fictions.

HPB's relation to what the spiritualists called "phenomena" is harder to explain sympathetically. When surrounded by friends and devotees, HPB was always able to materialize things as needed—an extra place setting for a tea party, lost brooches, on one occasion an ivory card case. She could also produce letters "precipitated" by the Masters, which would arrive at her door or appear on the desks of adherents without postmark or stamp, containing instructions; replies could be precipitated back.

Phenomena were in themselves unimportant, she asserted; they were merely demonstrations to the uninstructed that matter and time are beneath spirit and thought in a hierarchy of reality. She knew of their usefulness, though—how they roused astonishment and wonder in would-be followers, who spread stories in books and articles. The danger was to mistake the pursuit of phenomena for the pursuit of spiritual evolution. This was the failing of the kings and savants of Atlantis, who destroyed their civilization and saw their very land sink beneath the sea as a result of their desire for magic power.

Phenomena were also unreliable, sometimes easily produced, sometimes not. HPB would now and then be caught at a bit of plain trickery, and she would admit it without much embarrassment. Her own nature, she said, could be childish and mischievous, and people so much wanted to see these things. When late in HPB's life an embittered confederate spilled the beans about hidden doors and Master-shaped mannequins, the Society for Psychical Research investigated and published a damning report. HPB claimed to be rather relieved: she was at least done with the "cursed phenomena," and if the Masters were now seen as myths, "so much the better."

HPB's last work was called *The Secret Doctrine*, a title that could be given to a hundred books by a hundred hands but that now belongs to her. She wrote much of it in the company of a devoted countess

while on the road from Society headquarters in Madras to the Hotel Vesuvio in Naples ("an apt perch for so volcanic a character," Lachman inaptly observes) to lodgings in Germany and Belgium. She worked tirelessly, up at six and to bed at nine, like any author smoking and playing solitaire between bursts of inspiration. Her traveling library was a little scant, but she could log on to the astral Internet, and once visited the Vatican Library that way to check a reference. (The job of tracing all of HPB's allusions, buried quotations, lifts, and references will likely never be undertaken by a disinterested scholar, but it seems clear that she had a kind of photographic memory for occult knowledge, however randomly the snapshots were sometimes assembled.)

The Secret Doctrine takes the form of an immense commentary on certain stanzas in the Book of Dzyan, originally written in the language of Senzar that HPB had learned from Koot Hoomi in Tibet. Neither this book nor its language appears in any other source. *The Secret Doctrine* details a vast circle of evolution through seven Rounds during which beings of different kinds (the "Root Races") come into existence—some wholly spirit, some physical but highly advanced, some not so high. There were Root Races in Hyperborea, a once-mild land near the North Pole; in Lemuria (where Adam and Eve appear); and on overreaching Atlantis, whose giant residents built Stonehenge. Our current Round is that of Kali Yuga (not good), and the Fifth Root Race is the European/Aryan race. Though the Fifth will of course meet the same cyclical downturn as all the others, Aryan domination of the subraces of this Round was an idea that intrigued some Nazi thinkers. Lachman, who goes as far as ever he can in support of Blavatsky without falling into a trance state himself, says he "profited most" from *The Secret Doctrine* when he viewed it not as history/prophecy but as an attempt to create a new myth for the modern age, a "huge, fantastic science fiction story"—perhaps something like Doris Lessing's Canopus in Argos series of philosophical planetary romances.

Following HPB's death, theosophy expanded as a worldview even as the



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Winnifred Cutler, creator of 10X

ABC's 20/20 "SPEED DATE" TEST SHOWS ATHENA PHEROMONES CAN INCREASE ATTRACTIVENESS.

MESSAGE FROM DR. CUTLER

Dr. Cutler has a Ph.D. in biology from University of Penn, post-doc at Stanford. Co-discovered human pheromones in 1906 (Time 12/1/86; and Newsweek 1/12/87).

When ABC 20/20's television crew came out to Athena Institute to interview me, I had no idea of what "test" they might perform on my two pheromone cosmetics. And I did not suggest one. When I saw their 12/9/05 telecast, I found out. ABC 20/20 cleverly picked a "speed dating" contest with identical sets of twins.

One twin had been wearing Athena Pheromone 10X for men and one Athena Pheromone 10:13 for women. I knew that in two published scientific studies, my fragrance additives worked for 74% to increase sexual attractiveness. So you can imagine my pleasant surprise, that our Athena pheromones were successful in this non-scientific speed dating trial in 19 out of 20 trial "dates".

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to: Name ___

Address ___

City/State ___ zip ___

Phone: ___ email ___

(*PA add 6% tax, Canada add US \$7.50 per vial)

HP

society fractured. Annie Besant, in whose London house HPB spent her last days, was a British socialist reformer and a fiery public speaker, and she had HPB's blessing; but others claimed better psychic connection with the Masters. In India, Besant allied with C. W. Leadbeater, whose imaginary biography was as extraordinary as HPB's; he anointed a beautiful Indian boy (Leadbeater was drawn to beautiful boys) named Krishnamurti as the incarnation of Master Maitreya, Lord of the World—a destiny the boy rejected in the end. Quarreling theosophists referred (more than HPB ever had) to the Lords of the Dark Face, evil Masters who had appeared throughout the history of the cosmos: any opponent could be linked with them. Leadbeater and Besant began tracing (through trance) the web of remarkable reincarnations that had connected them to each other through the millennia, from Atlantis to Lemuria, the moon to Venus; it turned out they had often been husband and wife, or father or mother to each other or to other leading theosophists—a "cosmic soap opera," as Peter Washington calls it, that caused rifts and jealousies as members were or were not included. HPB had never been very interested in reincarnation. The lives she contained or created as she lived were perhaps plenty for her to contemplate.

All the events in a novel—the characters' lives and fates, the obstacles that events put in or clear from their paths, the reasons why everything happens—refer to and depend on an exterior, unperceived, and encompassing reality: the plot and the conception of the author. Cause and effect, seen one way by struggling characters, can be seen in an opposite way once this is understood. The weddings, deaths, or changes in fortune aren't truly the result of the characters' actions but rather the cause of them; they bring the characters to where the plot needs them finally to be. The characters themselves mostly remain ignorant of this, except in moments of transcendent understanding; and though readers can of course perceive it, they often forget or ignore

it, choosing to remain on the plane of unknowing.

Similarly, the theosophical universe comprises a lowly and factitious world of events and things to which unawakened souls are bound in life and a spiritual realm of true being that grants to the material world what meaning it has. (Material things also have no real existence in fiction; however well described or deployed, they're just words.) Objects can be materialized and letters precipitated because materiality is a veil of illusion, and if the overarching spiritual plot needs this ring or this ivory card case or this postcard from Koot Hoomi at this juncture, there it is. Events, things, happenstance, diurnal goings-on, exist only as they reflect or encode higher realities and ultimate purposes. If (like Peter Washington) you see HPB's voluminous draperies as full of forged letters and boosted jewels and her pronouncements likewise, you're not so much wrong as in the wrong realm of being.

Religions aren't all dualist in this novel-like way, of course; the orthodox sects of Western faiths, at least, mostly consider the common struggles of mortal life as real and as fundamental to our destinies. But dualist systems like theosophy will always appear, claiming to be the "perennial philosophy" underlying all religions. What vivifies and delights their adherents is precisely the thrill of decoding the encoded, reading the allegory of matter and time correctly, and thereby reaching a higher plane. To me it's their great limitation—not because the Higher Plane is rarely if ever reached in any way that has ascertainable consequences, but because it regards as trivial the grand net of random connection that links a smart, lonely child playing games in Russia to the Hindu-nationalist upsurge under the Raj, that puts the American not-really-inventor of baseball together with the inventor of the land of Oz, that brings the Bhagavad Gita to Mohandas Gandhi and the avocado to California. Those really did take place in real times and places, nodes of a single and singular cosmos whose meaning and course can't be known but to which, for a time, you and I and everybody else have the ineffable privilege of belonging. ■

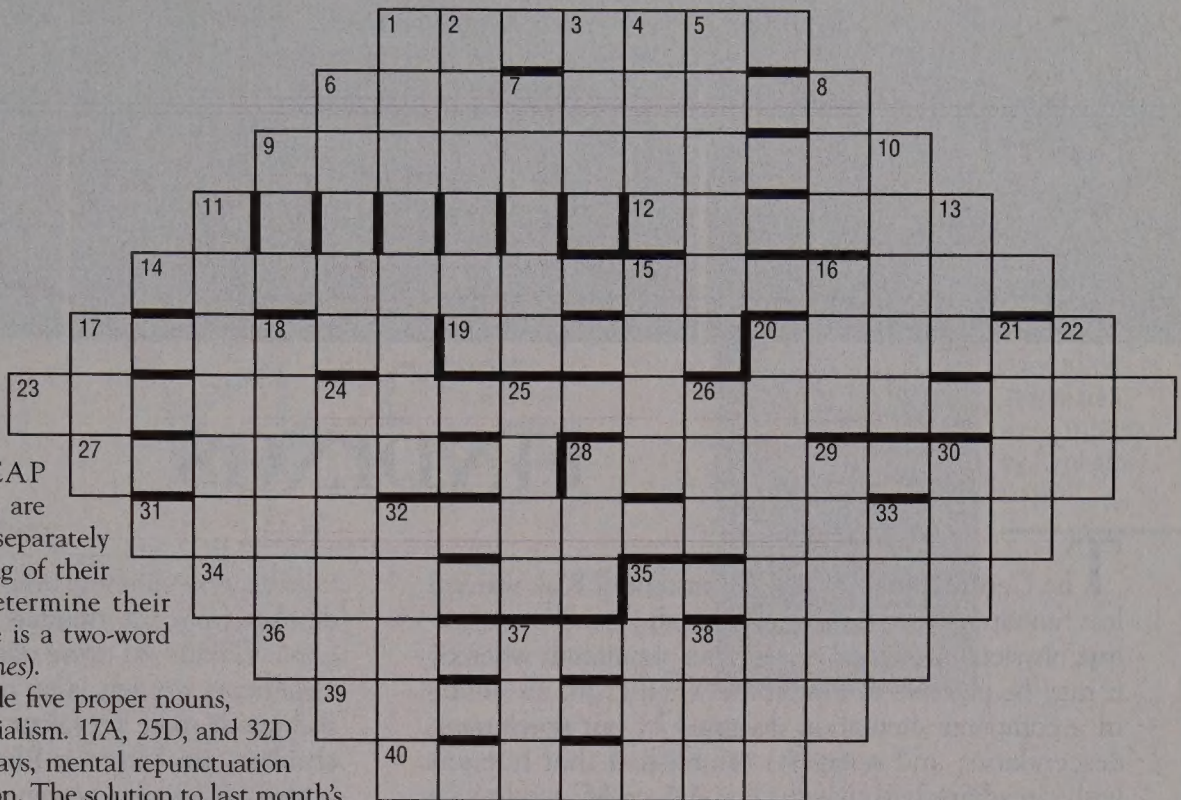
PUZZLE

SENTENCES

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

Some words can be read as sentences. REAPPEARS, for example, is readable as "Harvest some fruit" (REAP PEARS). Seven across entries are such words. They are listed separately and clued only by a rephrasing of their "sentences." Solvers must determine their location in the diagram. One is a two-word phrase (nod to the *London Times*).

Normal clue answers include five proper nouns, one foreign word, and one initialism. 17A, 25D, and 32D are uncommon words. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 79.



SENTENCES

- Say bad things about toilets.
- Send a message to sexual predators.
- Give Kelly a sensible funeral.
- Bump into a pop singer.
- Proscribe what's protecting the heads of Scotland.
- Play this score in only one key.
- Put wealthy consumers in an office.

ACROSS

- (see instructions) (7)
- Bridge players last month, in two hands, are South (9)
- (see instructions) (11)
- Wheat's harvested, which puts you in bind (6)
- (see instructions) (8,7)
- In Assembly, bloats produce division in Russia (6)
- Edited out Liberal leader? Indeed! (5)
- Pop-sounding joint for a Native American (6)
- (see instructions) (19)
- Caught up in greed, Democrat is given a big belt! (8)
- Hustles to make movie with reversal in the middle before big hits fail (9)
- (see instructions) (15)
- Disease sorely needs curing with injection of a bit of penicillin (7)
- Eagle a mascot? Not entirely—but it's shining! (6)
- (see instructions) (11)
- Tribe about to take clothes off outside made loud noises (9)
- (see instructions) (7)

DOWN

- So terribly tired, exhausted initially, in bed with drunk (8)

- Something that can be heard in three-part harmony! (6)
- Bland chopped meat (4)
- Category including a Lance Armstrong's leaders (4)
- Made catty comments when finding me outstanding (6)
- Washington's packaging is showing some spine (5)
- French sure to appear in the French TV comedy show (5)
- Place where upcoming trial is not allowed to finish (3)
- Scheduled directly (3)
- Displayed in the old style, cut in two directions (5)
- One liberal member, not quite total criminal (7)
- One seabird biting the head off another! (3)
- Loud command to a boxer: "Get better!" (4)
- Upchucking cereal—that's the way (3)
- Sole of shoe needs center replaced by a pole (3)
- An addition to a contract supplying dryer (6)
- Fancy man, one prone to be more like some teens (8)
- Leaves producers a million dollars in the next answer (4)
- Famous golfer doesn't finish otherwise (3)
- Beef and grouse ready to be eaten in Big Bills (6)
- Shed storing old letters (4)
- Relative in Toledo, oddly tribal (3)
- Whimsical comedienne (3)
- Buddy right away becomes monster (5)
- Bill collector sometimes takes 50 percent off at most (3)
- Nomadic roach—it grows in the desert (5)
- Sink holding fuel? Write it up! (3)
- A writer like Church (4)
- Jumbo or squirt? (3)
- Article taken from another (3)

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Sentences," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by February 15. Senders of the first three correct solutions opened at random will receive one-year subscriptions to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). Winners' names will be printed in the April issue. Winners of the December puzzle, "Season's Greetings," are David Appling, Morgan Hill, Calif.; Dan Hiatt, Oakland; and Lawrence Youngblood, Manchester Township, N.J.



FINDINGS

The Centre for the Study of Existential Risk warned lest humanity become complacent about a robot uprising; physicists designed a computer simulation whereby it may be possible to determine whether we are living in a computer simulation designed by our posthuman descendants; and scientists established that humans with circadian-rhythm genotype AA or AG tend to die just before 11:00 A.M., whereas type GGs tend to die just before 6:00 P.M. A Canadian student sued her university for failing to accommodate her allergies to cactuses, escalators, tall people, and mauve. A peanut-shaped asteroid was headed toward Earth. The Cretaceous–Paleogene Extinction Event was found to have killed *Obamadon*. No new poisons were found in Tycho Brahe’s beard. German scientists used satellites to track 1,500 crab-days of activity among giant roaming robber crabs, Australian scientists observed that innocent fish wander out of their reserves into a 150-meter naïveté radius, and fluid-dynamics researchers concluded that huddling penguins, though self-interested, share heat equitably. Australia’s government was using termites to look for gold. In Grapeland, Texas, a ring-tailed lemur named Keanu attacked a postwoman named Reeves. North Korean archaeologists confirmed the discovery of a unicorn lair. The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command announced the Navy’s plans to reduce its reliance on dolphin and sea-lion labor. MIT researchers found that drone operators perform better when minor distractions alleviate monotony. “War,” said a former Predator squadron commander, “is long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror.”

Israeli children who experience difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality suffer more intense nighttime fears; researchers suggested such children be given guardianship of a plush huggy puppy. Day care was linked to a 50 percent greater chance of obesity, and bouncy-castle

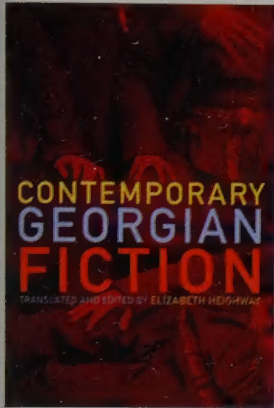
injuries were climbing ever higher. PTSD in soldiers may develop from the traumas not of combat but of childhood. Childhood abuse damages DNA and, in African-American women, also predicts adult-onset asthma. Sadness is more prevalent among artsy teenagers. Rich children are better at filtering out irrelevant stimuli. Happy adolescents become richer adults. Summer babies are less likely to grow up to be CEOs. Smart children are less likely in adulthood to report chronic widespread pain. Autistic children take longer to learn to be afraid of new things. Many Swedish children who self-harm don’t really mean it. Lying increases the temperature of the nose. A wandering mind shortens one’s telomeres. Fetuses yawn.

Materials scientists successfully predicted hydrogen embrittlement and hoped to create silk from the slime of hagfish. Neurobiologists created white smell. Dogs were found to exhibit no inherent shape biases, and Canadians were found likelier to spend money that looks dirty. Biochemists blocked the gene that allows fruit flies to perceive the gentle stroking of a human eyelash. British doctors urged the standardization of terminology and patient-orientation materials for such designer-vagina procedures as labiaplasty, hymenoplasty, and hoodectomy. Downward-facing flowers, compared with horizontal flowers, require 10 percent more energy expenditure from hummingbirds. Hip injuries are widespread among swans. Traditional salespitching was dying out in Britain. English may be a Scandinavian language. The magic number may be four. Mistletoe may kill colon cancer. Carp at Czech Christmas markets align themselves along a north-south axis. The North Star is 30 percent closer to Earth than previously thought, and all but 5 percent of the universe’s stars have already been born. Scientists concluded that it is particularly important to store box wine in a cool place. ■

*“Origin 6, 7, 8 (Meteor Crater), Arizona, United States,” gelatin silver prints with selenium toning, by Stan Gaz.
Courtesy the artist and ClampArt, New York City*



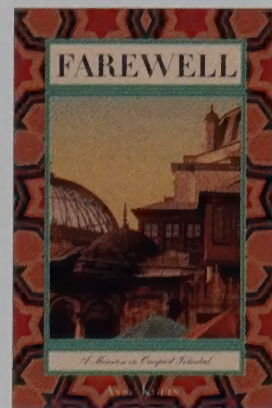
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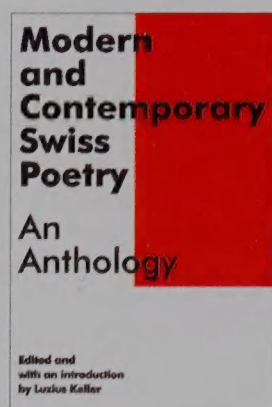
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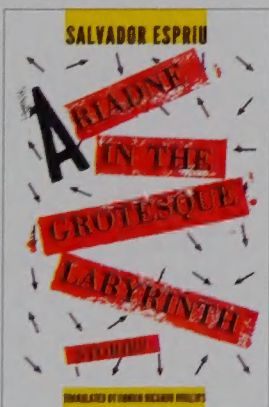
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